

# *MAGAZINE OF ART*

JANUARY 1952 75 CENTS THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS



BÉRNARD MYERS: **ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER AND "DIE BRÜCKE"**

SAM HUNTER: **FRANCIS BACON—THE ANATOMY OF HORROR**

MINOR WHITE: **THE CAMERA MIND AND EYE**

YVONNE HACKENBROCH: **AN EXHIBITION OF TAPESTRIES**

JOHN BEGG: **ABSTRACT ART AND TYPOGRAPHIC FORMAT**

SIEGFRIED GIEDION: **SPACE AND THE ELEMENTS OF THE RENAISSANCE CITY**

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# AMERICAN ART ABROAD

ART and government—or the problems of government in art—have often been discussed in the pages of this journal. Our own experience in these matters here in the United States has been so short-lived and so slim that the arguments pro and con had, for want of actual experience, to be largely theoretical. Our government has never had any permanent art program, so that some almost anonymously allotted war monuments, the Treasury Department's commissions, WPA (which admittedly was not a fair example), the State Department's ill-fated traveling show, halted in mid-career—these were about all that commentators could point to as examples, good or bad, of what happens when our government supports art. Hence the arguments by analogy with France's generally unfortunate Ministry of Fine Arts, and England's much happier and more recent semi-autonomous Arts Council.

Now, by turning conviction into action, The American Federation of Arts has furnished some additional evidence. By cooperating with other private organizations and so making effective minimal participation on the part of federal agencies, the AFA, initiating one exhibition and stepping into the breach to save another, has made possible two important showings of American art in Europe. An exhibition of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright (discussed by Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. in *MAGAZINE OF ART* for May, 1951), organized by Oskar Stonorov with funds made available through the generosity of Gimbel Brothers, Philadelphia, was stopped at pierside because the State Department refused to assume responsibility for its shipment. The Federation succeeded in raising the necessary insurance, and the exhibition was sent to Florence, where its success has been followed by demands from other countries for its showing in their capitals. The exhibition of American paintings and prints from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, held in Berlin as part of last year's Cultural Festival, was the first such showing in postwar Germany. Financed by a grant from the Oberlaender Trust, it was selected by a countrywide committee of museum directors working under the auspices of The American Federation of Arts.

In each instance, official participation was at a minimum. As a Foreign Service Despatch from Berlin puts it: "The role of the Department of State and the agencies of Hicog in Frankfurt and Berlin . . . was primarily that of facilitating direct cultural contacts between unofficial American institutions and the German sponsors."

The enthusiastic reception accorded these exhibitions is recorded elsewhere in this issue (page 39). But interest itself, though widespread and various, counts little; simple curiosity about a strange and newly powerful nation might account for it and would be accorded to any kind of a show. It is rather the changed conceptions of ourselves and our culture set down for us by reporters and critics that is significant: the discovery that Americans, notorious abroad for their immediate practicality, should have a strong and continuing streak of romanticism—for romanticism implies idealism and generosity of spirit; a new realization that for all our industrialization, and the barren jungles of our cities made familiar through many a movie melodrama, we still love the natural scene—for this suggests to those who know us only as travelers in their own lands that, after all, most of us may wish to stay at home; an undoubted awareness, given through the work of Wright, that American architecture is something more, and more human, than city canyons bordered by skyscrapers—and so must Americans be.

The critics voice their surprise; and the ordinary visitor, too, though perhaps less conscious of his own sensations, must have had borne in upon him new facets of American civilization and come away with more understanding and more brotherly feeling for the U.S.A. than he had had before. Consider how much of our own concept of what Europe is comes to us visually; how little the American tourist talks to Europeans (on matters other than train departures, boat schedules and unfortunate taxi tips) and how much, by contrast, he sees. True, we know from him and his annual fall reports that the art of a country is far from being a total image of its present reality—economic, social and cultural. But at least let us attempt to correct the balance; at least let us furnish people beyond our shores with some visual images to give substance to the constant stream of radio and newspaper words, and to suggest, too, that Hollywood is not America. Such a program may be only indirectly esthetic; it certainly is worth doing now, and we may thus use art as an instrument to show that for a democracy, art is also an end. It is a hopeful sign that the Wright show is in demand throughout Europe, and that Germany is asking for other exhibitions of American art. The American Federation of Arts is planning to play its part in meeting these requests. But an over-all, long-term program on a grander scale can ultimately be developed only with greater government participation. R. G.





## SPACE AND THE ELEMENTS OF THE RENAISSANCE CITY

*Siegfried Giedion*

IN a celebrated letter to Lodovico il Moro, Duke of Milan, which probably dates from the recurrence of the plague in that city in 1485-86, Leonardo da Vinci expressed a desire to see towns made more sanitary, so that their inhabitants would no longer have to live "packed together like goats and polluting the air for one another." He proposed building for the Duke ten towns, each with a population of five thousand, to be "situated on rivers regulated by locks. . . . Within them, light, air and cleanliness shall prevail." But although Leonardo's drawings include plans of existing towns, there are none of any *città ideale*, nor did Bramante, Michelangelo or any other renaissance artists leave us a plan for a new kind of town. The idea of the town as an entity in which the interactions of thousands of separate existences can be coordinated was foreign to the temper of the age—even to the vision of Leonardo, which so often leapt forward centuries in time.

What was new in renaissance civic design must be sought elsewhere: in the thorough mastery of a town's constituent elements. In that field, Bramante and Michelangelo opened up hitherto unknown possibilities. Intermediate between the fruitful gothic age, with its communal ethos, and the absolutism of baroque, the renaissance is a preparatory period in town planning. In northern countries, the fifteenth century is still wholly

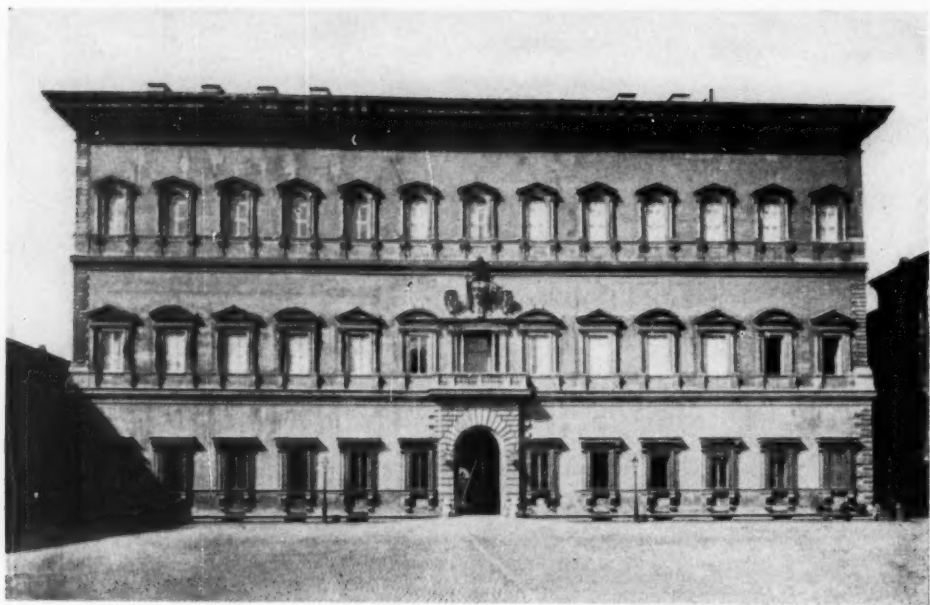
gothic, but in Italy the position is complicated. Although perspective was creating a new attitude of mind, the gothic tradition lived on in many ways and influenced the implementation of city improvements. In a sociological sense, there was no marked contrast between Italy and the North in this transitional period. Evidence of the persistence of the gothic in northern Italy can be found in a large number of public squares laid out during the *quattrocento*, for example the Piazza del Santo in Padua, the Piazza Grande in Parma, and the realignment of the Piazza del Campo in Siena.

The renaissance learnt to handle large volumes and shape them into new forms. Palaces often thrust aside the homes of the townsfolk, streets and squares. But their builders discovered how great expanses of wall could be opened onto the street—something antiquity had never achieved, though here and there it had sometimes allowed glimpses of the street from one or two windows. Renaissance palaces gaze wide-eyed upon the outside world as if they were seeking to appraise it (just as with the new medium of perspective), in contrast to gothic elevations in which the windows remain islanded, lost in a vast expanse of walling, as in the thirteenth-century Palazzo della Signoria at Florence.

About 1500 we find windows ranged upon windows, each treated as a separate feature and

**NOTE:** This article, condensed from a forthcoming new edition of *Space, Time and Architecture* (© 1952, by the President and Fellows of Harvard College) is printed by permission of Harvard University Press.

Above: Luciano da Laurana, *Architectural Perspective*, c. 1475, tempera, 32 11/16 x 86 9/16", Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore. Piazza of an ideal city, showing an interesting treatment of different levels and a surprisingly modern spatial setting.



Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and Michelangelo, Façade of Palazzo Farnese, Rome, 1534-1545.

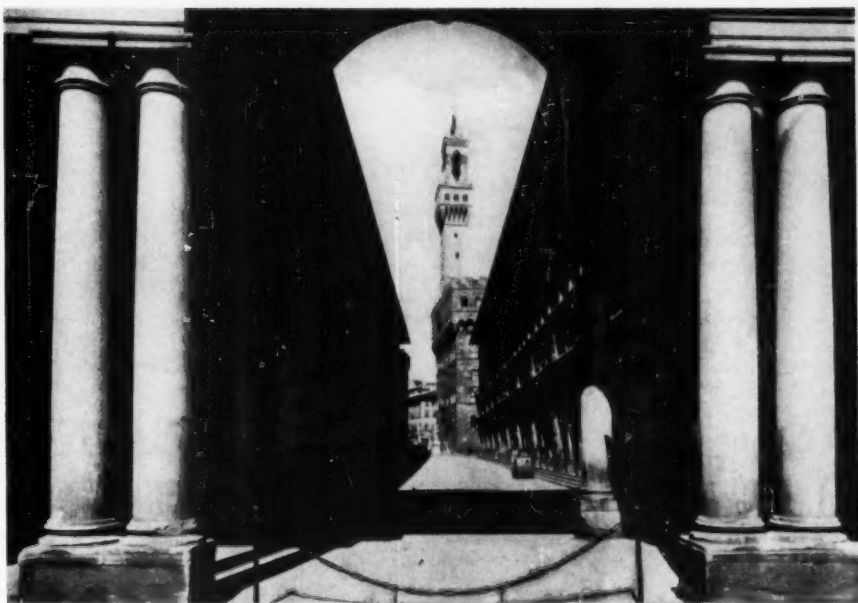
accentuated by pediments, pilasters or columns, yet rhythmically articulated to one another. Nowhere can the changes undergone by the wall surfaces be more plainly perceived than in the Farnese Palace at Rome, begun by Alessandro Farnese in 1514 while he was Cardinal and completed for him as Pope Paul III. Antonio da Sangallo the Younger designed the building and carried it out up to the roof cornice, but Michelangelo, among others, added to it after Sangallo's death in 1546—that is to say, at the very end of the late renaissance. Sangallo's volumes overwhelm the capacity of the site, exemplifying the exaggerated individualism of the renaissance mind. The incredibly pretentious magnificence of this residence for a single man points to the imminence of the baroque and epitomizes the transition from individualism to absolutism. Michelangelo knew how to express this plastically. Sangallo had already emphasized the central window by giving it two concentric arches, in contrast to the alternating triangular and segmental pediments over the windows on either side. This contrast Michelangelo made more salient by placing an architrave over the dominant central window, so that the whole emphasis could be concentrated on a huge shield carved with the Farnese arms and surmounted by the papal tiara. This monumental window seems to await the arrival of the great overlord who is about to show himself to an expectant populace.

On the garden front the Palazzo Farnese faces the Via Giulia, which Bramante had traced,

and the Tiber. Feeling the need for more open space around the huge bulk of the palace, Michelangelo proposed a bridge across the river so as to include the Farnesina and the Trastevere quarter, in a manner later adopted for the approaches to many French châteaux.

Even where it would have been quite easy to do so, the renaissance did not treat the street as a unit. Scenically, from the late *quattrocento* to the mid-sixteenth century the renaissance street consisted of a number of individual buildings set down at random on separate sites. In Laurana's fine paintings of streets and squares, no two houses are alike. Even the porticoes of houses which clearly call for uniform treatment are not continuous: each house has its separate arcade. As late as about 1550, as can be seen in the frequently reproduced stage set of Sebastiano Serlio—which was not designed simply to produce a perspective effect—the street is still an agglomeration of heterogeneous buildings.

Thus when Bramante at the behest of Pope Julius II laid down the alignment for the first new street in Rome, the kilometer-long Via Giulia, he did not envisage continuous frontages. He intended to place his Palace of Justice with its massive quoins and corner towers foursquare along part of this street. The Palace of Justice was begun in 1506, but after Pope Julius II's death the work stopped. A few Cyclopean blocks of stone built into some nearby houses give an idea of the extent to which this building would have disrupted the Via Giulia.



Giorgio Vasari, *Uffizi*, Florence, 1560-74. View from the arch of the loggia which checks the vista towards the Arno. Continuous horizontal lines produce a masterpiece of perspective in depth.

All the more surprising, therefore, is the architectural uniformity of the short street in Florence originally known as the *Piazza degli Uffizi*, on which Vasari erected administrative buildings for the Medici between 1560 and 1574. The continuous, lightly bracketed triple cornice seen with the symmetrical outline of the roof above make this a masterpiece of perspective in depth. This regular planning of the Uffizi would have been almost inconceivable but for the example Vasari's master, Michelangelo, had given him in the group of buildings on the Capitol at Rome, which was then under construction. This is apparent even in such details as the use of alternating piers and pairs of columns; but instead of being dynamically backed against the piers, as on the Capitol, Vasari's columns are just spaced out at regular intervals. Vasari is known to have shown his designs to his master in Rome, so Michelangelo had a hand in the design.

Besides their boldness in handling the surfaces of walls facing streets and squares, renaissance builders went to great pains to bring horizontal surfaces lying on different planes into spatial relation with one another. This they achieved by the device of imposing monumental stairways left open to the sky. Bramante used these flights of steps to incorporate expanses of outlying space into his composition and thereby introduced a new element into urban architecture.

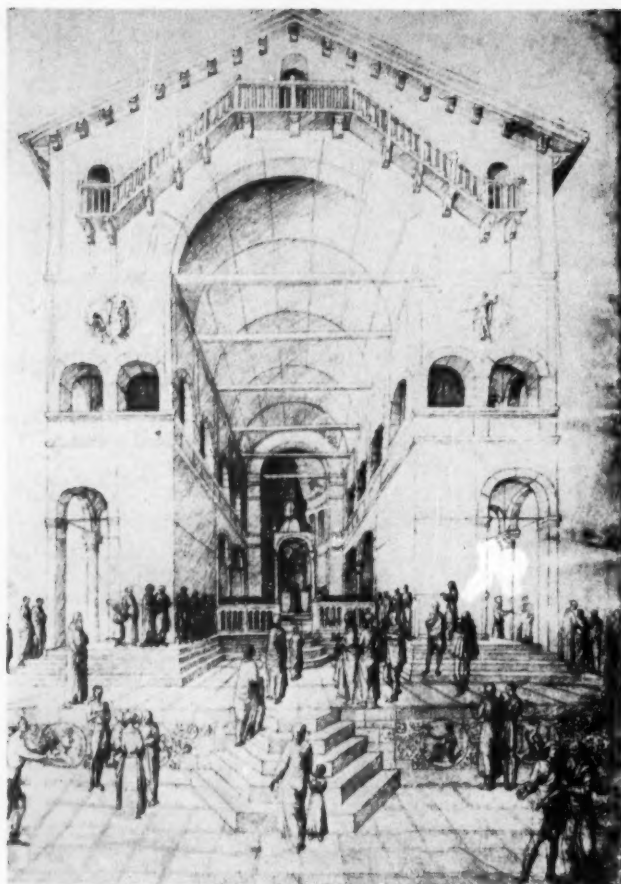
Building in terraces goes back to very remote times in the Orient, and pyramidal flights of steps serving as the plinths of temples or as pro-

cessional approaches to sunken courts are a conspicuous feature of hieratic architecture in pre-Columbian America. But although neither terrace formations nor monumental stairways were new in themselves, renaissance builders—especially later ones—used both in an entirely new way.

A silverpoint drawing of about 1440 in Jacopo Bellini's sketchbook shows the purpose that a stairway was intended to serve. A barrel-vaulted church crowns the rise of three successive terraces with a stairway which zigzags backwards and forwards from one level to another. These terraces, like the numerous figures dotted about the foreground and background, reveal the designer's object: to produce an effect of perspective in depth.

Donato Bramante of Urbino (1444-1514) was the first architect to introduce monumental stairways as a formative element through which space could, as it were, be embodied in the design of buildings; and the place where he first realized this intention was in the garden forecourt of the Belvedere at the Vatican (1506-13). Bramante's buildings of about 1500 display for the first time the new grandeur which the atmosphere of Rome and the patronage of a humanist pope—Julius II—brought into the work of the artists. Bramante evinces a new sense of power in his control of the unprecedented dimensions he was called upon to handle at St. Peter's after 1506. Though less ambitious, his handling of the Belvedere's forecourt is no less masterly.

The Belvedere is a small papal summer residence on an eminence some 330 yards distant



Jacopo Bellini, *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, c. 1440, silverpoint drawing, Cabinet des Dessins, Louvre. The zigzagging staircase is the early attempt of a painter to convey perspective in depth in terms of architecture.

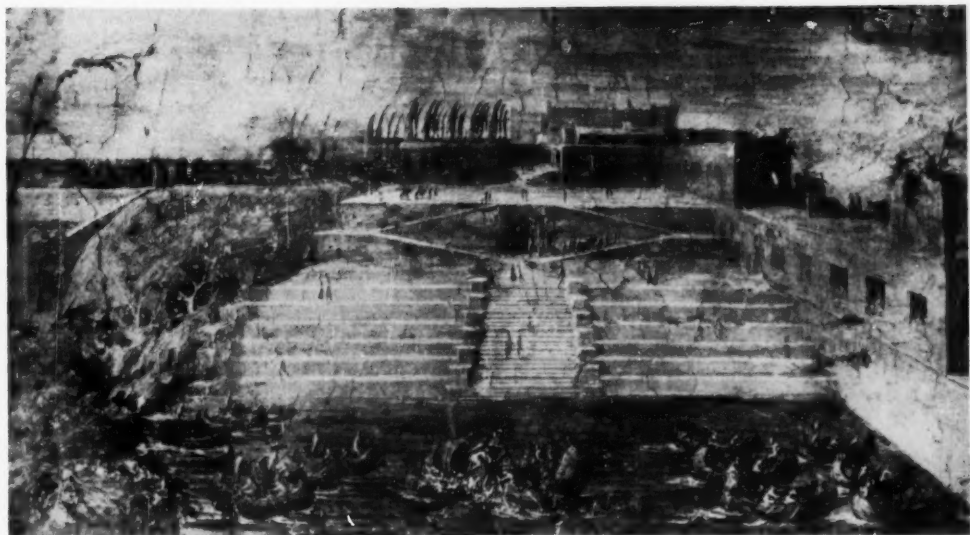
from the Vatican Palace. In 1506, Julius II entrusted Bramante with the task of combining these two buildings in a comprehensive architectural vista. The Pope had already set up some classical sculpture in the forecourt; he now directed that the whole intervening area was to be remodeled in the new majestic Roman manner. As the culminating point of his vista at the upper end, on the front of the Belvedere, Bramante erected a monumental screen with a huge niche in the middle, after the manner sometimes adopted in villas under the Caesars, and at the lower end, in front of the Vatican, a semicircular arena. Terracing enabled him to establish a formal relation between the new buildings with their triple tiers of loggias.

Here we are concerned with this stairway only as a means of articulating areas and weaving them into a spatial unit. A wide flight of steps leads from the first to the second level, where it divides into two branches under the re-

taining wall to gain the topmost garden, and with it the Belvedere. As secluded as the garden of an immense medieval cloister, everything here was devised for courtly pleasures. Nearly fifty years after Bramante's death, when the vast ensemble had finally been completed, the marriage of one of Pius IV's nephews provided a fitting occasion for inaugurating the Cortile del Belvedere. Etienne du Pérac's engravings have perpetuated the splendor of those sumptuous feasts and tournaments. But the Cortile was not destined to remain for long as Bramante had remodeled it. A quarter of a century later, in 1589, Sixtus V wrecked the unity of the design by building a new library athwart the middle of its parterres. Though that great town planner destroyed many monuments of ancient Rome, this was his most destructive act.

Later on, as at S. Maria Maggiore, the monumental stairway, of which Bramante's stately ascent to the platform of the Belvedere had been





Perino del Vaga (?), Cortile del Belvedere, detail of fresco, Castel Sant' Angelo, Rome, 1537-41. The open stairway and ramps become a new element of urban design in Bramante's hands.



Etienne du Pérac, Tournament in Bramante's Cortile del Belvedere, Rome, 1565. Executed shortly after the completion of the Cortile by Pirro Ligorio and before the annihilation of Bramante's conception by Sixtus V's Library.



the prototype, became the noblest pediment that could be added to a church. Eventually the monumental stairway was to become an almost independent structure, whose role was to merge planes lying at different levels into a single field of space, for example, the Spanish Steps (1721-25) which connect S. Trinità dei Monti with the Piazza di Spagna. In late baroque interiors we find large staircases—the symbol of movement—used to create cavernous voids unparalleled in the history of architecture.

In the great square in which stood the Roman Capitol, Michelangelo showed how to achieve a balance between carefully molded masses—the spatial relationship of great volumes. When he undertook this work in 1536, he had already reached the zenith of his fame as a painter and sculptor; the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the Tomb of Pope Julius and the Medici Chapel in Florence all lay behind him. Thus his architecture is the fruit of his ripest years. Lorenzo Bernini, whose colonnade in front of St. Peter's so marvelously completes Michelangelo's conception, and who seldom spoke good of others, said of him: "Michelangelo was great both as sculptor and painter, but divine as an architect." These words find an eternal echo in the Area Capitolino, where Michelangelo's plastic genius created a sublime spatial symphony out of what had been a jumble of medieval remains.

This square, now called the Piazza Campidoglio, occupies the cliff-top site of the ancient Capitol which overhung the Forum Romanum. It is a complex of three buildings, the square itself and a broad ramped stairway called the Cordinata which leads down to the town. The whole complex faces towards the medieval city, and closing the approach is the town hall—the Senatorial Palace—flanked on the right by the Palazzo dei Conservatori and on the left by the Capitoline Museum, the world's oldest collection of antiquities.

Michelangelo lived to see finished only a part of his great branching stairway before the Senatorial Palace; both of the other buildings were begun after his death. In spite of certain modifications introduced in the course of their construction (which continued well into the seventeenth century), the plans and dispositions he had prepared in 1546 and which are reproduced in Du Pérac's engravings of 1568 and 1569 were adhered to in essentials.

The Cordinata was not yet built when Charles V made his triumphal entry into Rome in 1536. He had to clamber up to the Capitol from the other side—the Forum—to which the Area Capitolina had been oriented in Roman times. The Cordinata is a ramped stairway, an inclined plane built up of sloping treads. Those mounting the wide, shallow steps to the platform above are constrained to a slow measured ascent. Gradually the bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, transferred from the Lateran to the

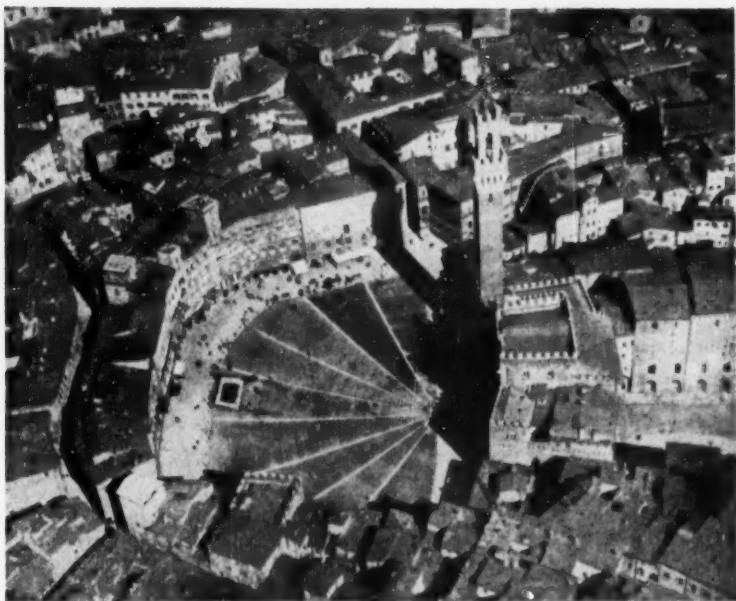
center of the square by Michelangelo, comes into sight. As an effigy it is, as Stendhal remarked, as nobly simple in its disdain of all heroic gesticulations as the unassuming pedestal Michelangelo designed for it. None the less its lonely, sky-girt position commanding the axis of the stairway from the very center of the square proves that the master who confidently handled such unprecedented voids as the dome of St. Peter's could treat the nicest gradations in plane with the same unerring sureness.

This wedge-shaped piazza narrows towards the balustrade where the stairway debouches. No particle of the ground has been left unconsidered. The oval placed within the square is slightly recessed and ringed around by two steps, whose curving shadows define the statue's ambit. The ground itself swells gently upwards towards the pedestal. This spot is called the *caput mundi*, and its curving surface has been likened to a segment of the terrestrial globe.

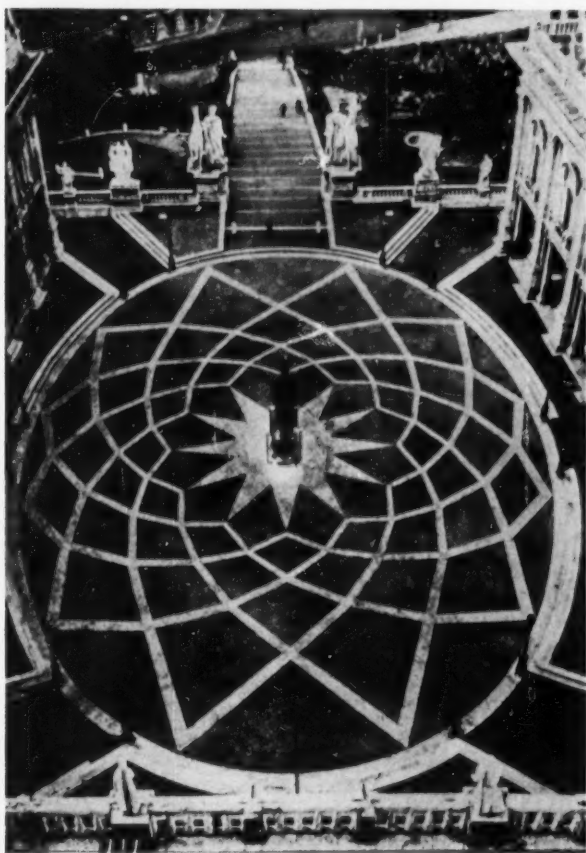
What an excitement has now infected those quiet stripes of marble which, in the *quattrocento*, used to cover the surfaces of the most distinguished squares—such as the rounded piazza at Siena! Now the stripes radiate out in fingerlike beams from Marcus Aurelius on his pedestal to form a twelve-pointed star of flattened intersecting curves. Their fantastic pattern enflames the whole frenzied interplay of contrasts: oval, trapezoid, the background of Roman and medieval tradition, the subtly shifting interplay of baroque light and shadow that models the walls, the grandiose gesture of the great stairway, the Cordinata: all combine to form a single all-embracing harmony; for the relation of each to each, and of the whole to its parts, has been consummately attained. One understands Vasari's statement, "Michelangelo worked miracles to whatever he set his hand."

That, as Tolnay reminds us, "extremely divergent opinions as to Michelangelo's precise historic significance" should have prevailed among scholars ever since Jacob Burckhardt is understandable enough, for Michelangelo was one of those infrequent geniuses who bridge periods in art that do not necessarily succeed one another chronologically. He connects the worldly universality of the baroque with the spirituality of the gothic. Life and death to him were one and the same: "From the day of his birth, every man is doomed to carry the seed of death hidden within him." In 1555 he wrote to Vasari, "I have never expressed an idea which was not molded in the lineaments of death." That is the utterance of a medieval craftsman, not a renaissance artist. Yet he was always powerfully attracted to the problems of movement, and to experimentation with its artistic and physical potentialities—an urge which, being inherent in Western man, permeates gothic just as it does baroque.

The architectural significance of the Capitol can be rapidly summarized. It is a develop-



*Piazza del Campo, Siena, paved 1413. Eleven streets run out from the huge shell-shaped square set in a natural slope. The white marble stripes of the pavement shoot out like rays from a lighthouse at the community's focal point.*



*Michelangelo, The Capitol, Rome, begun 1536. The three great buildings that surround the square are seen here only as fragments, but the photograph, taken from the height of the Senatorial Palace, shows the trapezoidal form of the piazza, the sunken oval, the equestrian statue in the center of the twelve-pointed star, and the majestic stairway leading down to the medieval city.*

ment of Bramante's use of terraces at the Belvedere into an element of city planning. It is a comprehensive composition in depth—piazza, stairway, city—and at the same time a preparation for the great axis emanating from a single building, the Senatorial Palace. In the Area Capitolina, Michelangelo was able to carry out some, though not all, that he had vainly planned for the Palazzo Farnese. Later, in the hands of the French, the axial vista was studied with particular assiduity and was to become the vertebrate principle of eighteenth-century town planning.

What is the *real* significance of the Area Capitolina? None of Michelangelo's notes about the Capitol exist, so there is free scope for conjecture as to what was in his mind when he planned this proud civic monument to the purely nominal remnant of autonomy that the citizens of Rome could still lay claim to. What could his private feelings have been when he built it?

In 1530 the city republic of Florence lost its former independence to the Medici despot Cosimo I. Michelangelo had taken an active part in the defense of his native city against the Medici Pope Clement VII. Following the death of the Pope who was his personal enemy, Michelangelo left Florence in 1534 in profound antagonism to the new régime and spent the last thirty years of his life as a voluntary exile in Rome. After the death of Sangallo the Younger in 1546, he became the city's master-builder. Though he was then over seventy, every important building was entrusted to him: the dome of St. Peter's, the Farnese Palace, the whole comprehensive layout and design of the Capitol.

Charles de Tolnay, who has shown profound insight into Michelangelo's political beliefs, quotes a sonnet which reveals all the gnawing bitterness he felt even as late as about 1545. In that sonnet the artist's own statue of Night in the Medici Chapel says:

*"Non veder, non sentir, m'è gran ventura;  
Però, non mi destar, dehl parla basso!"*

("Speak softly lest I wake, for this one sovereign boon I crave: to see and feel no more!")

The significance of the Capitol would appear to be analogous to that of this sonnet. In neither does Michelangelo express himself directly but deliberately chooses to speak through a seemingly impersonalized mouthpiece. Could he really have raised the Capitol to glorify a shadowy vestige of power? Should we not rather see in it a passionate longing to retrieve the lost freedom of his native Florence—a dream wrought out and made manifest in stone?

The whole of Michelangelo's work reflects his own tragic conception of life. Even in planning his layout he knew how to give succinct expression to the conflicting motives that actuate every human being and every true democracy: the need to preserve the rights of the individual while safeguarding those of the community. What he had derived from his youthful experiences in Florence was brought to reality in the Rome of the Counter-Reformation: a Rome in which there was no freedom and no democracy. So his Capitol is both a symbol of the vanished liberties of the medieval city republics, and at the same time a memorial to the tragic dream of its creator.

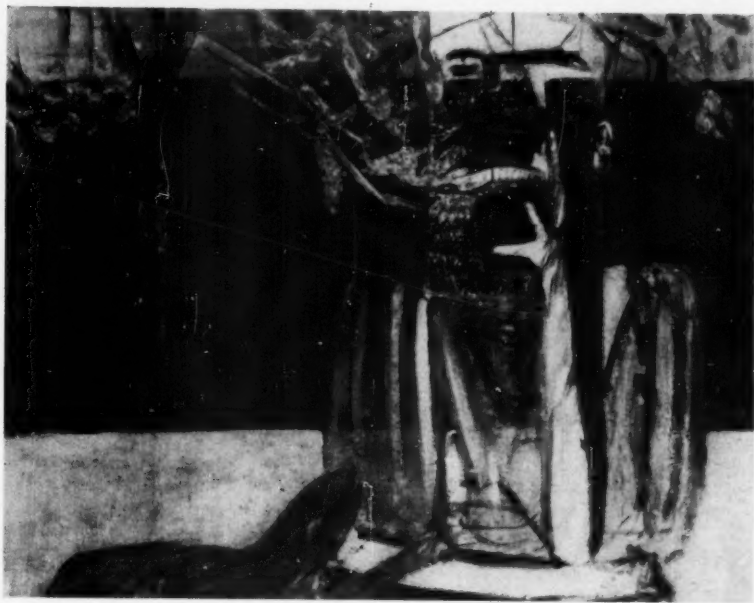
The supine imagination evinced by our contemporary attempts to devise new features in town planning, such as civic centers, is invariably condoned on the pretext that we no longer have a manner of life it would be possible to express. What Michelangelo has mirrored in the Area Capitolina is the baffling irrationality of historical events and the enigmatic omission of any direct relation between effect and cause. Once more we realize that a great master is able to create the artistic form for a phase of social history, long before that phase has begun to take tangible shape.



Michelangelo, *The Capitol, Rome, begun 1536.*

# FRANCIS BACON: THE ANATOMY OF HORROR

*Sam Hunter*



*Seated Figure, 1937, 29 x 37"*

FRANCIS Bacon stands out vividly from the scene of contemporary English painting because he seems so foreign to it. There is no preparation for the violence of his content, his "baroque" technical ingenuities or intensely private symbolism in the work of Sutherland, Moore or Piper, for example, or the younger neo-romantics, all of whom maintain some recognizable connection with the abstract idioms of Paris or have revived a native tradition of finding picturesque and ominous shapes of fancy in the English countryside. Bacon's paintings are as artificial and immediately "modern" in their sensation as the loud-speaker, the newsreel or the scare headline. In so far as his art has derivations, he has gone over the head of English painting for a reappraisal of the formal experiments of cubism, the Parisian surrealists' reveries on a machine-age gone berserk, or, in spirit, to the iconoclasm of a temperament like that of Wyndham Lewis. More than anything else, however, he seems to be another of the magnificent, incalculable freaks that English painting has periodically sponsored.

England seems to provide an atmosphere congenial to pictorial eccentricity. Blake is the obvious example. Even the most respectable of artists, Gainsborough, in his moments of relaxation is capable of unpredictable, tangential visions. Some of his daft, adrift ladies of fashion provide curious glimpses of a romantic wish, of the same suppressed, extravagant poetry that plays through the exotic daydreams of the Pre-Raphaelites. Bacon's images, like Turner's, represent a wayward dream on actuality and traffic across the frontiers between reality and unreality. But his imagery of contemporary nightmare is far removed from the Arcadian dreams of Turner. The pressures of contemporary life and the pessimistic London mood that produced George Orwell's bleak estimate of human prospects, 1984, have given Bacon the vision of a Cassandra and cast him in the role of an expert in the pain and guilt of our time.

Bacon's studio has the character of a modern laboratory. At one end stand his paintings, unique and extremely personal inventions. At the



other are tables littered with newspaper photographs and clippings, crime sheets like *Crapouillot* and photographs or reproductions of personalities who have passed across the public stage in recent years. The only law governing Bacon's selection of this visual literature is some kind of mysterious topical and psychological pertinence. Violence is the common denominator of photographs showing Goebbels wagging a finger on the public platform, the human carnage of a highway accident, every sort of war atrocity, the bloody streets of Moscow during the October Revolution, fantastic scientific contraptions culled from the pages of *Popular Mechanics* or a rhino crashing through a jungle swamp. The artistic issue of this raw matter is unpredictable and without literal antecedents. Somewhere between the simple cold mechanics of the camera and the most charged moments of recent history it has recorded, Bacon has set up a shadowy and crepuscular world of imagination, playing on associations of violence and terror.

Bacon's paintings could only be possible in contemporary postwar London, with its exacerbated nerves, its own distinct psychological atmosphere. There are certain clues even in the location of the artist's studio. He lives and works on the edge of South Kensington, in one of those neglected side streets where the old fashionable quarter suddenly peters out into the anonymous suburbs. On one side is the bizarre face of Victorian London—the unexpectedly exotic, crenelated and spired skyline of the vast apartment blocks and museums surrounding the Albert Hall, the Albert Memorial and other curious architectural extravaganzas. Proceeding towards Kew and Richmond in row after row of drab boxed houses is one of the dreariest of urban areas, which pro-

duces the kind of intense impression of respectability in reduced circumstances that must have inspired Eliot's lament for the living-dead of London in *The Wasteland*. Bacon is faithful to this atmosphere of vacuity with its sinister and claustrophobic overtones that deepen into horror.

A combination of the distorted human atmosphere that prevails in any modern postwar metropolis, but peculiarly in London, and an uncompromising search for extreme expression has made Bacon carry his imagery from contemporary actuality to its furthest frontiers. His art begins at the point where all our safe, plausible images begin to flaw and deform and develop frightening bugabears. Typical of his style and aims is the Tate Gallery's picture called simply *Painting*. An orator-like figure—established in a glowing, impressionist technique that suggests a corrupting Walter Sickert canvas—stands in a commanding public attitude on a raised dais. This creature of nightmare curiously suggests in its dark anonymity the modern European Everyman. Its visage dissolves into a lewd, simian grimace and gaping wound, while the platform fuses into some sort of barred contraption—does it suggest a cage, the subway turnstile or the medieval rack?—and seems to have a machine-gun mounted on it. The total effect is as if we had witnessed a conventional heroic pictorial representation disintegrate, first, in a kind of unwholesome, poisonous "real" atmosphere, and then in psychological space, under a hail of violent mental associations culled from headlines and illustrated catastrophic journalism.

The transfiguration to horror and a dedication to the most unpleasant expressions of contemporary life are the basic conscious forces at work in Bacon's paintings. The rest is the product of

"The only law governing the selection is a mysterious topical and psychological pertinence. Violence is the common denominator." (Photographs by the author)

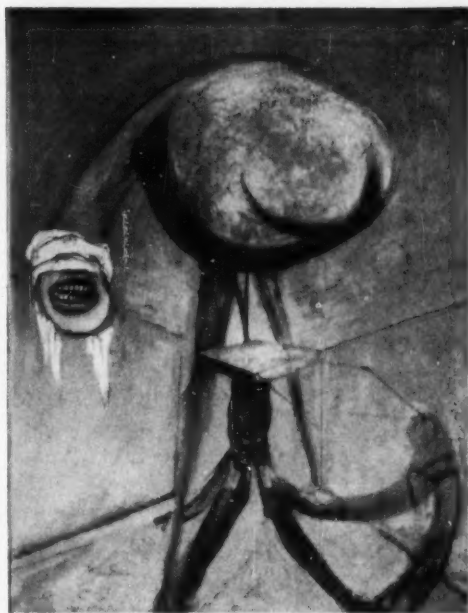




inspiration, chance and automatism, in their best sense. The fluid imagery of cubism, the surrealists' taste for the incongruous and the startling deformations of instantaneous photography have all been factors of technical importance. They could have been ignited into new and extraordinarily vital combinations only by the temperament of an incendiary. But behind the deceptive effect of spontaneity is a rigorous personal discipline of vision and a long period of trial and error in sorting and choosing relevant images, and of learning how to marry vision and technique.

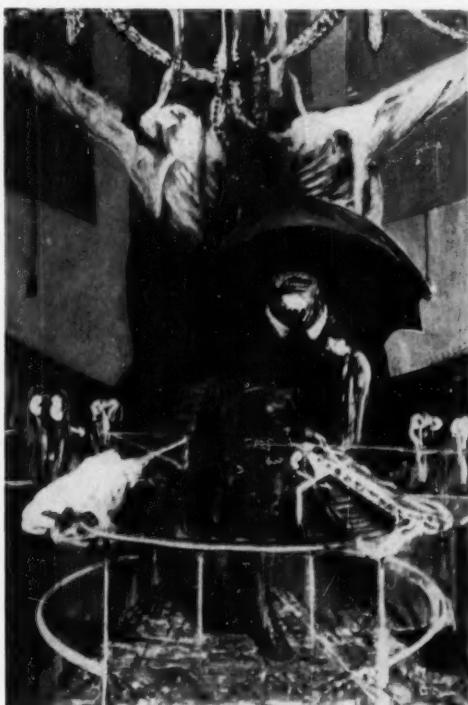
Bacon has a Bergsonian horror of the static. Consequently he has tried to quicken the nervous pulse of painting by moving it closer to the optical and psychological sources of movement and action in life. To stimulate a sensitivity to the significant instant of action and gesture, he has collected a whole literature on the mechanics of motion. He consults or at least has been affected strongly by Eadweard Muybridge's *The Human Figure in Motion* and *Animals in Motion*. They provide some clue to the working method that finally produces an effect of pure ephemera. They also, incidentally, have a rich period flavor, much like the anatomy charts and medical diagrams that found such a welcome response earlier among surrealists. The analytical breakdowns of movement are matched by Bacon's addiction to news photography, already mentioned, which gives him accidental correspondences for the working of interior psychological forces. They establish a delicate synapse between optics and the mind's eye—a mind's eye preferably off guard, i. e. under the spell of the subconscious. Perhaps that is why Bacon finds it so difficult to formulate his aims. "I think the whole process of this sort of elliptical form is dependent on the execution of detail and how shapes are remade or put slightly out of focus to bring in their memory traces," he has said. "This depends so much on the manipulation of the paint that it is almost impossible to put it into words." For Bacon only the results, the successful, inexplicable naked vision is worth discussing. He says, "I would like my pictures to look as if a human being had passed between them, like a snail, leaving a trail of the human presence and a memory trace of past events as the snail leaves its slime."

Bacon's paintings all date from after the war. His earliest, of 1945, are *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*. (The motive of Christ's martyrdom has constantly held a particular fascination for him. It has a startling effect in a painting like the Museum of Modern Art's *Painting*, 1946, when it is translated into a modern situation, as a background for a kind of political gangster standing before a microphone.) The early studies are chimeras in the tradition of Picasso and are, incidentally, the only paintings to suggest a connection with an English contemporary—Sutherland—in their livid, chemical magentas. For all their power these images fall



Study for Three Figures at Base of a Crucifixion, 1945, oil

Painting, 1946, oil and tempera, 77 1/8 x 52", Museum of Modern Art





Man and Monkey, 1949,  
collection Anthony Hubbard,  
courtesy Hanover Gallery, Ltd.,  
London

uneasily between a crude symbolism and scatology. In the last version of the *Crucifixion*, painted in 1950, symbolism and style, enriched by a wider range of pertinent association, have reached a triumphant juncture. The earlier disemboweled, offending forms are re-introduced, but now they suggest the actual nervous sensation of writhing, tormented flesh. The symbol of the cross is a black, broad T, as irrelevant to the agony of the painting as the modern street intersection it suggests. In the background, in minute calligraphy, are figures walking and cars moving, against the line of the sea—possibly a distracting bit of Mediterranean summer scenery. The episode suggests how far from the banal business of the world are suffering and damnation.

Bacon has an almost uncanny ability for making contact with the Terrible. Even when old masters provide some suggestion for his extraordinary inventions, they are divested of their normal associations. One of the recent variations on the theme of Velázquez' mundane *Pope Innocent X* in the Doria Gallery became a diagram of psychological horror—and iridescent beauty. The worldly Prince of the Church was transformed into a living scream imprisoned in a gorgeous filament of rainbow color. The elements of old masters that invite Bacon's interest are never

calculable. They may range from the ambiguous spatial qualities and ghostly suggestiveness of that most rational of artists, Seurat, in one of his oil sketches for *La Grande Jatte*, or more understandably, the brutal clotted shapes and profiles of some unexpected camera-angle vision of a Rodin sculpture.

Bacon's fascination with photography accounts for one very haunting effect of his art. Even his most diagrammatic and automatic inventions retain a wealth of concrete impressions, a kind of on-the-spot veracity. Underlying the paintings is a chain of ideal monuments and types, a system of cross-reference to a set of contemporary visual classics, but they perversely come out of the world of the memorable news snapshot or the crime sheet. Needless to say, Bacon's record of contemporary history reads like a lesson in ignominy. His art deals with our most ubiquitous public images and discloses unimagined possibilities of the predatory in the private individual.

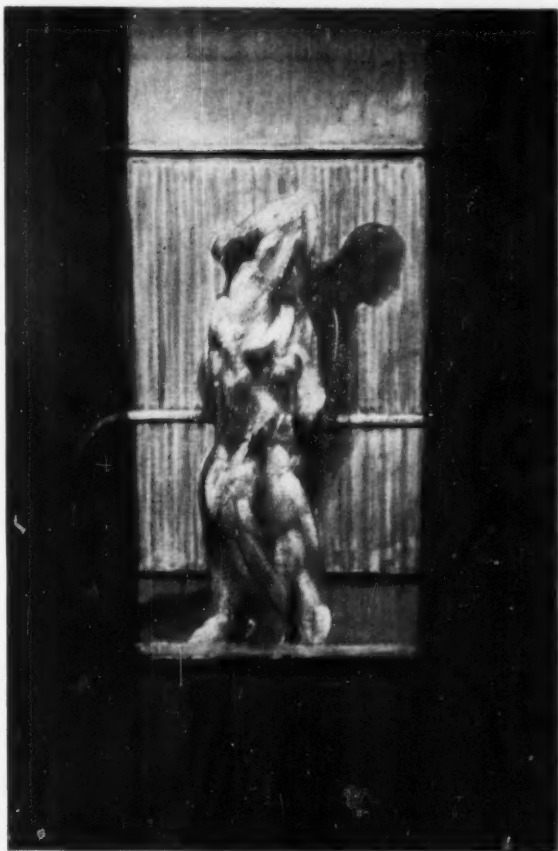
Bacon's inspiration from the accidental distortions and monstrous infelicities of the photograph haven't prevented him, however, from remaining supremely a painter's painter. Away from the preoccupations of symbolism, he is capable of shimmering, silken graces in paint. There is the slightly ominous *Study for a Figure*, nothing

more than a nude male form gliding through a curtain. The image materializes with the suddenness of those jerky sequences of the early films, where, by some misarticulation or vital omission of the camera figures seem to appear *through* doors and make magical entrances out of nowhere. The real sleight-of-hand of the painting, however, is a nervous, painterly life and diaphanous fragility. The luxurious, unsubstantial pigment reminds us that Goya is one of Bacon's strongest admirations. The English critic, Robert Melville, was the first to pay tribute to Bacon's technical virtuosity and his "modernity." "Never," he has written, "has there been more elation of execution, never a greater sense of freedom: yet it occurs in the atmosphere of the concentration camp."

The infrequency with which Bacon's paintings manage to survive the most self-critical of natures and emerge from his studio make it difficult to speak of them. Only Kafka, who left instructions in his will for the destruction of all his manuscripts, put as little faith in the efficacy of his art. Bacon's entire productive career has produced a handful of paintings, and even when a painting is delivered it is not altogether safe. He

recently recovered one of his finished works from its owner for modifications and promptly destroyed it. For Bacon, gradations in art between enchantment and banality don't exist: the dividing line is absolute. A master of deception, he maintains a ruthless vigil against self-delusion. In his own life, he sharpens his taste for ruin by periodic excursions to the gambling halls of Monte Carlo. Disaster in moderation is apparently both a vocational habit and a personal predilection.

The fascination of Bacon's art is that, while remote from any of the directions of contemporary painting, it is thoroughly contemporary in its vitality. No one has interpreted the acute postwar moods more vividly. Yet he has remained insular, mannered and extravagantly eccentric, too, in a sense that none of the younger painters who still follow the fortunes of international abstract idioms are. Bacon's thoroughly modern horrors are concocted still with a neo-Edwardian sense of luxury; and his satanism, despite an up-to-date clinical note, can suggest the *Yellow Book*. If Aubrey Beardsley's generation were alive and given the benefits of a modern education, it would no doubt be painting in the style of Francis Bacon.



Painting, 1950,  
Temple Newsam House, Leeds,  
courtesy Hanover Gallery, Ltd.,  
London

# THE CAMERA MIND AND EYE

## *Minor White*



Helen Levitt,  
New York,  
1941

**I**f we had no words perhaps we could understand one another better. The burden is ours, however. So in using the word "creative" to refer to a state of mind in photographers, I expect to be fully misunderstood.

It is no longer news that a cameraman is faced with a very different situation from that of a painter starting a new canvas. The latter has a bare surface to support an invented image, or a blank space in which to spin invented volumes or, as probably some artists feel, a free space in which to live, dance, think—leaving marks where a thought passed or a tactile muscle felt a color. And as he is inventive, he is creative—or so it is popularly thought.

The photographer starts from an image already whole. Superficially it looks as whole as a finished painting, although it is rarely completed. The photographer completes the whole or total image by analyzing a variety of whole images. So the photographer invents nothing; everything is there and visible from the start. Here I should, I suppose, be worried to find that I have written that a photographer invents nothing, since in the recurrent discussions over the creative possibilities of the camera medium, the fact that the photographer invents little if anything is a point the cons labor and the pros fumble trying to circumvent.

(Not that it is necessary, of course; the photographs of Stieglitz and Weston provide all the evidence needed.) However, still other evidence has accumulated—the work of the great documentary photographers, for instance—which shows very well that our continual linking of the word "inventive" with "creativity" has kept us from remembering that creativeness is expressed in many ways. It is time that we in esthetic fields remembered that analysis in scientific fields is often as inspired or creative as a work of art. We should also remember that the camera is a definite link between science and art, or, if not a link, that it partakes of both. It is time we recalled that "man seen" or "man found" is just as expressive of creativeness as "man made." It is time to remember (the period of discovery is long past) that the camera lures, then compels, a man to create through seeing. It demands that he learn to make the realm of his responses to the world the raw material of his creative activity. Creative understanding is more camera-like than invention.

A young man looking at a photograph of mine—in the midst of experiencing and before he could weigh his words, said, "This is like a painting." Since this did not sound very much like what he had in mind he tried again. "It is obviously a photograph. But the placement—looks—as if a man



--as if a man had invented them--things are where a man would put--them--it looks man-made--not like nature--not found."

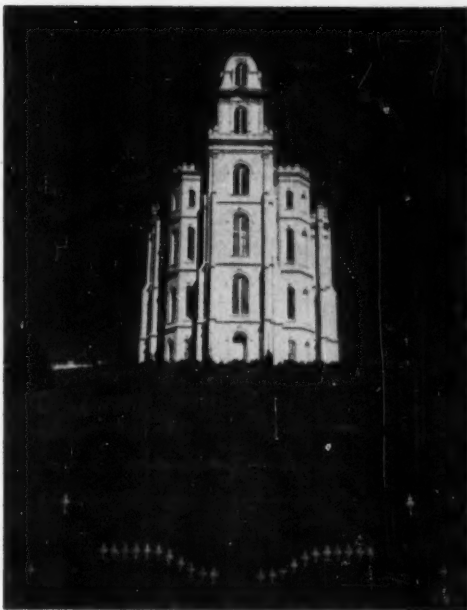
Yet it had been found, "seen," and merely recorded by the camera. (Because a man trains himself to see like a camera, it is only more appropriate that he uses a camera to record his seeing.) That this picture causes a reaction in a young painter that he can talk about only in terms of painting does not mean that an "esthetic reaction" is taking place. Perhaps it began with little more than an impact of recognition of something like a painting. We must remember, however, that recognition is frequently the start of the "esthetic" chain reaction.

If he was only surprised at the likeness, consider where he found the likeness: in the perceptive realm of man, not in the camera's imitation of some aspect of painting surfaces. His reaction is important because it shows that we are so conditioned to painting as the criterion of the visual esthetic experience that the possibility of a photograph's being another path to esthetic experience, like a piece of sculpture or a poem, has been overlooked or not realized--if not actually denied or pushed out of the realm of possibilities.

Yet to "see," to "find," is a human activity linked to human creativeness. The fact that this particular young man related a "found" picture to his experience of the "made" objects and could enjoy it as if it were a "made" object is a simple demonstration of how human the "seeing" of photographers is. And, if one would stretch the demonstration slightly, of how inventive "seeing camerawise" is.

The state of mind of the photographer while creating is a blank. I might add that this condition exists only at special times, namely when looking for pictures. (Something keeps him from falling off curbs, down open manholes or into the bumpers of skidding trucks while he is in this condition but goes off duty at all other times.) For those who would equate "blank" with a kind of static emptiness, I must explain that this is a special kind of blank. It is a very active state of mind really, a very receptive state of mind, ready at an instant to grasp an image, yet with no image pre-formed in it at any time. We should note that the lack of a pre-formed pattern or preconceived idea of how anything ought to look is essential to this blank condition. Such a state of mind is not unlike a sheet of film itself--seemingly inert, yet so sensitive that a fraction of a second's exposure conceives a life in it. (Not just life, but *a* life.)

In a way the blank state of mind is a little like the blank canvas of the painter--that is, if we must have an analogy and insist that art must have a point of departure from nothing. (If a blank sheet of paper can be called nothing.) Poets buy a ream of paper and wonder what obscurity will darken the sheets or what revelation will illuminate the mind reading his black marks.



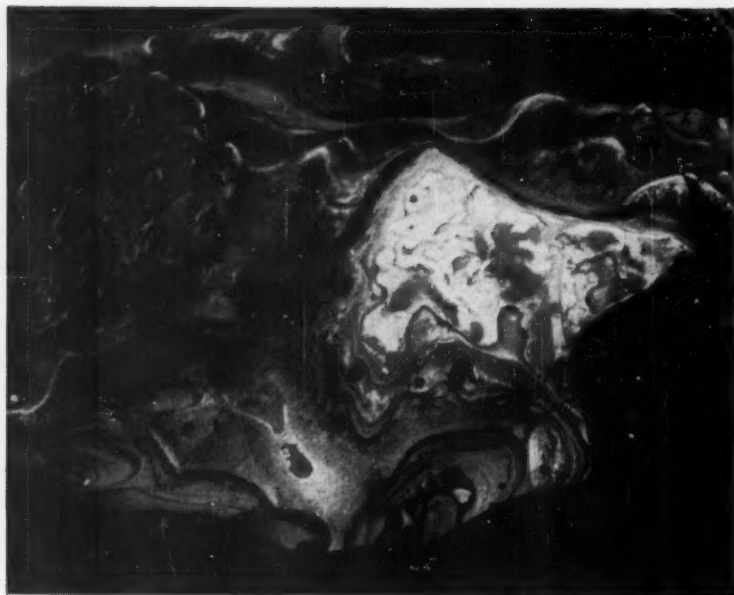
Ansel Adams, Mormon Temple, Manti, Utah, 1948

But the paper's blankness has little to do with his creative action. Or to the sculptor feeling somehow the form lying in a block of stone, the stone is not a blank so much as a wrapping that only he can unwind.

The photographer is probably more akin to the sculptor in wood or stone than to painters, as far as his mental creative state goes. The whole visual world, the whole world of events are wraps and coverings he feels and believes to be underneath. Often he passes a corner, saying to himself, "There is a picture here"; and if he cannot find it, considers himself the insensitive one. He can look day after day--and one day the picture is visible! Nothing has changed except himself; although, to be fair, sometimes he had to wait till the light performed the magic.

A mind specially blank--how can we describe it to one who has not experienced it? "Sensitive" is one word. "Sensitized" is better, because there is not only a sensitive mind at work but there is effort on the part of the photographer to reach such a condition. "Sympathetic" is fair, if we mean by it an openness of mind which in turn leads to comprehending, understanding everything seen. The photographer projects himself into everything he sees, identifying himself with everything in order to know it and feel it better. To reach such a blank state of mind requires effort, perhaps discipline. Out of such a state of mind he loves much, hates much and is aware of the areas of his indifference. He photographs what he loves because he loves it, what he hates out of protest; the indifferent he can pass





Minor White,  
51-248,  
1951

over or photograph with whatever craftsmanship of technique and composition he commands.

If he were to walk a block in a state of sensitized sympathy to everything to be seen, he would be exhausted before the block was up and out of film long before that.

Perhaps the blank state of mind can be likened to a pot of water almost at the boiling point. A little more heat—an image seen—and the surface breaks into turbulence.

Possibly the creative work of the photographer consists in part of putting himself into this state of mind. Reaching it, at any rate, is not automatic. It can be aided by always using one's camera for serious work so that the association of the camera in one's hands always leads to taking pictures. But certainly once the mood is reached, that which happens can get out of control, as it seems it should. We have heard of inspired singing, of inspired poetry, of inspired painting—of production during moments of intensity or lucidity when one feels as if one is an instrument of transmission like a narrow channel between two oceans. (Do telephones feel this way?) The feeling is akin to the mystic and to ecstasy; why deny it? And in this condition the question of whether photography is or is not art is laughable. One feels, one sees on the ground glass into a world beyond surfaces. The square of glass becomes like the words of a prayer or a poem, like fingers or rockets into two infinities—one into the subconscious and the other into the visual-tactile universe.

Afterwards one can look at the photographs and try to find in them something by which to explain what happened. In the illustration titled

51-248, I can point out that light seems to come from inside the photograph, which is certainly not at all like the condition which my reason tells me prevailed at the time, though exactly like what I saw in a moment of highly charged vision. I can also say this symbolizes the emotion felt while making it, and know only how little of this vision the picture must cause in others. Feeling and photographing what causes feeling is no assurance that others will feel. But after once discovering what one wants to arouse in other people, the knowledge that one may frequently fumble in trying is only a challenge.

The picture mentioned above climaxed an afternoon's work in which I started out by saying to myself, "What shall I be given today?" It progressed by stages of a growing awareness of absorption into the place. Exposure after exposure were sketches leading—in no very conscious way—towards this final one. The same shapes, forms, designs recurred with a growing tension. When this was seen on the ground glass, anything separating man and place had been dissolved.

This is no isolated experience, occurring only with nature; I can parallel it with many experiences in photographing people. The duration of a session is one of growing rapport, of a deepening friendship. The camera is hardly more than a recording device for an experience between two people. They create in one another—only the photographer is conditioned to see like a camera, so the end result is a photograph.

This is not so much a scholarly discussion of the photographer's creative state of mind as it is a first-hand report. The scientist using the



Alfred Stieglitz, *Venetian Gamin*, 1887, Venice, Museum of Modern Art

camera as an instrument will probably not have much idea of what I am talking about; however, photographers using the camera as a deeply expressive medium or those using it to document human situations will have experienced the sensation of the camera dissolving in an accord between subject and photographer. And what impresses me now is that I no longer care to

prove that some photographs can do the same thing for people that paintings do. (They call it "art.") I merely want to cause in others some degree of experience: shall we call it spirituality? identification? by using photographs as the excitant. The photographs, may I add, *not* the objects photographed? While the photographer cannot eliminate the object (nor does he want to destroy the experience of the visual world transforming into an unconscious world, the very source of his excitement), he still wants the photograph to be the main source of the spectator's feeling. While he cannot erase from the viewer's mind the implications of the subject, he prefers to depend for his effect on the visual relations that are present in the print itself.

"Blank" as the creative photographer's state of mind is, uncritical as it is while photographing, as sensitized, as prepared for anything to happen, afterwards with the prints safely in hand he needs to practice the most conscious criticism. Is what he saw present in the photograph? If not, does the photograph open his eyes to something he could not see by himself? If so, will he take the responsibility for the accident and show it as his own, or will he consider it as a sketch for his subconscious to digest? He needs to study further the reactions of the viewers: do they match his own? come close? or depart in amazing directions? In a sense, this is the activity that brings the creative state of mind near the boiling point: conscious criticism of new prints, digestion of what the prints do, as compared to what he wanted them to do. Without this siege of analytical work, the state of sympathetic sensitivity, the "blank" state of mind will not recur.

Harry Batz, *Goodbyes Come Hard as Soldiers Leave Home*, 1950, from *The Hartford Courant*, courtesy Museum of Modern Art



# ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER AND *DIE BRÜCKE*

Bernard Myers



Nude Dancers, 1903, woodcut,  
14 1/8 x 20 7/8", Museum of Modern Art

KIRCHNER'S importance to the modern movement extends far beyond his leadership in *Die Brücke* from 1905 to 1913. If we except Nolde, who was never an integral part of the group, Kirchner was the only one to remain predominantly expressionist throughout a long career that included a period in Switzerland from 1917 until his death in 1938. Had he remained in Germany, it is possible that his work would also have been affected by the anti-expressionist trend of the middle 'twenties.

Born in Aschaffenburg in 1880, Kirchner was brought up in Chemnitz. A study trip to Nuremberg in 1898 showed him the art of Dürer and other early German graphic masters. That year he began his own woodcuts. Upon graduation from the Realgymnasium in 1901, Kirchner went to Dresden to study architecture, but he also spent much time studying painting and art history. The following year he began to work on artistic problems with Fritz Bleyl, another student of architecture, and also began to etch. In 1903-04 Kirchner spent two semesters at an art school in Munich, bringing away vivid impressions of Rembrandt's drawings, important for his later ability to represent figures in motion. Later in 1904 he returned to architecture and met another student, Erich Heckel, who joined Kirchner and Bleyl in their art studies.

In his various early attempts to avoid the academic, Kirchner painted a few *pointillist* pictures, studied such late medieval German masters as Beham and Cranach and was interested by

Japanese prints. During 1904 also, Kirchner "discovered" African and Oceanic carvings in the Dresden Ethnological Museum—significant for the subsequent evolution of the *Brücke* group and its inclinations towards the primitive. At this time Heckel set up his store-atelier in the Berlinerstrasse. Here and in Kirchner's room near the Hochschule, the two worked, together with Bleyl.

Kirchner's first works, especially the drawings, pastels and even the initial woodcuts he was later somewhat reluctant to acknowledge, show a reliance on *Jugendstil* methods and the clear influence of Edvard Munch, who introduced the color woodcut into Germany. The color woodcuts of Félix Vallotton with their flat, brilliant color areas and subdued romantic mood also play a part in this evolution, as in Kirchner's color woodcut *Circus Horses* of 1905. Most striking in this early work is its decorative quality, its two dimensionality and abandonment of traditional space naturalism; but strong primitivist and emotive elements change the character of the mixture.

During 1905, the group organized *Die Brücke*, together with another architectural student, Schmidt-Rottluff, who contributed the lithographic process. Kirchner received his architectural diploma but decided to go in for painting as a full-time activity. During the following year the group was enlarged by the inclusion of Emil Nolde, Max Pechstein, the Swiss Cuno Amiet and the Finn Axel Gallén. The most important events of that year were two exhibitions in the lamp factory at Dresden-Lobtau which brought *Die Brücke* before the public for the first time.

In the years 1907 to 1909, Kirchner and his friends spent the summer months on the Moritzburger Lakes north of Dresden, studying the free movement of the nude outdoors—a significant part of expressionist self-identification with nature. In the winter months they worked together in communal fashion in the studios of Kirchner and Heckel. Kirchner's works of this period, representing nudes in nature, or street, café and circus scenes, are still primarily decorative in the fauve sense, although more concerned with human beings as subject matter. We may note the dependence on Munch, and especially on Toulouse-Lautrec, in such outstanding pictures as the 1907 *Street Scene* or the *Portrait of Heckel* (1908, Basel, Kirchner Estate), which like most *Brücke* paintings at this point are more fauve than expressionist or mystical, yet far more exciting than



*Street Scene, 1907, oil, 59 x 79", Museum of Modern Art*

most French fauve pictures. They represent a combination of Munch's frontalized forward-moving figures, with their strong linear, cursive and rhythmical quality, and a kind of jeweled color that seems to stem from French art. The somewhat brutalized contours of the paintings of this period show the influence of Kirchner's woodcut methods.

With Kirchner, as with Pechstein and the others, Van Gogh began to exert an increasing influence, as in the *Fehmarn Houses*. Color at this time varies from the heavy impasto effects seen here to more decorative, flatly applied areas; the spasmodic application of color was to emerge again in the works of the Berlin period.



*Fehmarn Houses, 1908,  
Hagemann Collection,  
Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt-a.-M.*





*Variété*, 1907, oil,  
Hagemann Collection,  
Städtisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt-a.-M.

In this first period there already appears that powerful erotic feeling we associate with so many expressionist masters, but especially with Kirchner in his pre-war works. During this phase, his preoccupation with sex manifests itself in a long series of male-female nude arrangements in various media. Men and women are seen bathing together, indoors and outdoors, lolling about in various positions, making love or symbolizing love.

These and other factors tend to separate Kirchner's art from the fauve even while it is so strongly under French influence. His Germanic concern with emotional values rather than with decorative aims—plus the example of Munch—accounts for the difference. In such a disturbing sensual apparition as the *Nude Couple in the Sun* (1907) or in the predated *Variété* of the same year, with its introspective café performers, we see how again and again the artist begins with nature but goes much further in order to achieve expression. Emerging through the power of contrasting flat color areas, these characters express an idea or an emotion. Kirchner is never content with a "form for form's sake" presentation.

The early Dresden epoch was filled with economic problems that were only partially resolved during the next period in Berlin. We gather

impressions of frantic, exciting group activity, the production of *Brücke* graphic portfolios, the group's decided predilection for figure-painting, the powerful feeling for nature, the blending of elements from Munch, Van Gogh, fauve and primitive art into a highly meaningful, symbolic representation of life.

In 1910 Kirchner met Otto Müller, the last *Brücke* recruit, with whom he made a trip to northern Bohemia. Kirchner executed the *Brücke* portfolio for 1910 and took part in the first exhibition of the Berlin New Secession, which had just been formed. Early in 1911 he moved to Berlin and from October 1911 to January 1912 his drawings appeared in *Der Sturm*.

In 1912—a big year for Kirchner—he and Heckel were commissioned to decorate the forty-foot high chapel of the International *Sonderbund* Exhibition at Cologne. Kirchner also contributed works to the second exhibition of the *Blue Rider* in Munich and to their Berlin show at the galleries of *Der Sturm*. His meeting with the future Mrs. Kirchner also took place in that year, which marked as well the beginning of his work on the *Chronik der Brücke*.

Under the influence of the metropolis—its tensions, its exciting life and its disparities in eco-





*Nude Girls on the Shore, 1912, 47 x 35 1/4",  
Dr. E. Amstad, Schatzacker, Switzerland*

*Street Scene, 1913, oil, 27 1/2 x 19 3/4",  
Dr. E. Amstad, Schatzacker*



omic status—Kirchner's work becomes increasingly psychological. His added depth of feeling is evidenced in a new Rembrandtesque type of dynamic drawing and an almost convulsive painting which was to last until after the war. There appears a whole new series of street scenes, Fehmarn landscapes with and without bathers, portrait studies, interior scenes of all kinds, men and women erotically or symbolically combined. These paintings of the years before the war are in some ways a development of the Dresden pictures, but in richness of color and poetry of mood they represent a high point in the painter's production. Pictures like the *Nude Girls on the Shore*, the 1913 *Street Scene* and *Sick Woman* are not only most typical of Kirchner's own work but of expressionism as well.

The *Nude Girls on the Shore* reveals Kirchner as possessing perhaps the greatest sensitivity of the *Brücke* group. Here nature is used as a real mirror of the artist's soul, somewhat similar to earlier romantic art but on a new level of universal rather than individual emotional intensity. The expressionist painter loses himself in nature not merely for the sake of escape but rather to arrive at some beyond-earthly truth. Pictures of this type, though deriving from Gauguin and Matisse, have neither Gauguin's self-consciousness nor the decorativeness of Matisse's esthetic. Utilizing the French artist's pictorial means of intense colors, flat areas and brutally indicated forms, Kirchner has brought together a pair of vivid red shapes outlined in bold blue against a pink background and greenish foliage—deliberately tense and discordant combinations. From the expressionist point of view, the picture evokes a mood of other-worldliness that is genuine and even mystical, justifying itself esthetically as well as culturally and historically.

The broad, indefinite outline in pictures of this type (probably borrowed from children's art) serves to create a directness and simplicity of feeling, and helps to submerge the forms in the irregular background, increasing the identification with nature. Along beaches or in forests, these *Brücke* figures are amalgamated into their backgrounds, the artist working towards a generalization that subordinates the figure and makes it look almost as though it had grown out of its background. In this manner a mystical unity of the human and the universal is achieved, the more or less savage men and women existing before us in a "state of nature." Psychological tension is heightened by bringing the spectator close to the subject, the entire picture space often being covered by the figures, which in some instances may even be cut off by the frame.

These apparently tropical (although actually local) scenes take on a disturbing quality, partly because of this nearness, partly because of the juxtaposition of opposed rather than complementary colors, and finally because of the brutalized and amorphous arms and legs. The grace

of so much fauve art disappears in these paintings, where it is scarcely possible to speak of the picturesque or exotic. In their union of man and nature their intent is clearly symbolic, but this is far different from either the picturesqueness of Gauguin or the decorativeness of the fauves. Uncompromisingly emotional in approach, the painters of *Die Brücke* portray strong feelings as violently as possible. Subordinating pictorial considerations to emotional expression, they concentrate on fundamental human problems, and their work strives towards symbolic portrayal of these conflicts and urges. By 1912-13, they have moved beyond their fauve-colored Dresden works to an art compounded of the spasmodic and atonal color of Van Gogh on sketchy linear forms, the brutality of primitive sculpture and the philosophical-mystical approach of Munch—whose point of view, rather than whose technique, influences the *Brücke* movement as a whole.

Apart from these scenes of man and nature, Kirchner and some of his friends were especially interested in big-city subjects of café, entertainment and street life, portraits of the penetrating, subjective Kokoschka type and occasional Biblical subjects. Although many of these categories had been treated earlier, they had been different in color and drawing, more subdued and poetic, less dynamic and pulsating.

The Amstad collection *Street Scene* of 1913 extends Kirchner's interest in the movement of the city, its people moving confusedly and carelessly along the streets. They are symbols of another kind, but just as important as the nature themes. Here again we are attracted by the powerfully sensuous appeal of the colors, the Gauguin (or, better, Munch) rose of the street, the yellow-green of the sidewalk, the green and blue people with green or reddish faces. But this strength and tension of color has the function of isolating individual figures while effecting a dynamic design that holds the picture together in what Kirchner speaks of as "closed composition."

Clothed or nude, his characters are part of his interpretive comments on life. His people with their masklike faces are concerned with their own mental worlds. Yet the figures in the *Street Scene* have distinct characters, meant to symbolize the various kinds of city humanity. Here Kirchner is analytical, where in the *Bathers* he had been more poetic and universal; yet both paintings look beyond physical appearance towards some greater truth, some inner beauty of meaning and mood.

The primarily symbolic *Street Scene* may be contrasted with other well-known examples of this theme, such as that in the Museum of Modern Art, which emphasize a deliberately mannered quality in elongated forms, spasmodically cross-hatched drawing and self-conscious decadence. This more characteristic kind of painting is also exemplified by the *Street Corner*, a diagonally arranged yellow and green composition, architec-

turally solid yet decorative and emotively effective. Other city themes include *Gas Tank* with its yellow-green explosive sky and *Women with Wash Basin* (see cover), dynamically designed in decorative patterning and color oppositions.

Kirchner's infrequent portraits are characteristically expressionist, their profound subjectivity and analytical probing related to his predecessors Munch and Van Gogh and to his contemporaries Nolde and Kokoschka. In these faces, Kirchner, like many of his colleagues, best expresses the unhappiness of modern times. One of the most penetrating is the *Sick Woman*, bringing to mind other *Brücke* portraits and their common ancestors, the sick people painted by Kokoschka in 1909-10. This painting is distinguished by the angularly shaped eyes and the distinctly separated nose planes, which adapt African influences for specific emotional reasons. To accentuate the sense of uneasiness Kirchner has used an asymmetrical composition involving subtle contrapposto, so that color, drawing and pose combine to effect the artist's purpose.

The unhappiness of the *Sick Woman*, like the hemmed-in figures of Heckel or the mystical personages of Schmidt-Rottluff, represents the artist's protest against a bourgeois environment whose oppressive hand was felt everywhere, refusing the individual his meed of free expression. Although the *Brücke* painters are certainly sympathetic to the poor and oppressed, their art is never directly social; basically, their interest is in a spiritual revolt against the times. In Kirchner's case, more than with the others, there is a particularly convulsive and unhappy quality that was not to be satisfactorily resolved until after the war.

Kirchner's preoccupation with sex is one symptom of his maladjustment, and everything he touches during those last pre-war years takes on a nervous, unhappy quality. Humanity is appraised in its least attractive aspects. When he shows us *demi-mondaines* in the street, he is interested in them not as Lautrec had been, but rather as representative of basic human problems that offend him as an individual. Here again we see how much artists like Kirchner owe to Munch and how, in a sense, they have gone beyond him. Where Munch had confined himself to generalized emotional problems (man-woman, life-death, greed, jealousy) the Germans give a symbolic importance to almost everything, encompassing in this way many aspects of life.

In spite of the many similarities of style and intent which united Kirchner and other members of the *Brücke*, their emergence into the life of the big city accentuated their individual development and inevitable divergence. During 1913 Kirchner finished the *Chronik der Brücke*, but it was repudiated by the others because of its too personal approach, and only a limited number of copies were privately printed. The *Brücke* was officially dissolved in 1913.

Kirchner's misery during two years in the army (1914-16) culminated in a nervous breakdown which, complicated by other illness, sent him ultimately to Switzerland where he spent the rest of his life. This transitional period is mirrored in the *Self-Portrait as a Soldier* at Oberlin, where his morbid fear of the war is shown in the imaginary bloody stump he holds up. Here, and in the *Self-Portrait with a Cat*, Kirchner moves away from the spasmodic drawing of the Berlin period to a more sculptural point of view. The latter picture, moreover, shows a new serenity and even monumentality. Kirchner has finally relaxed.

In numerous drawings, graphic works and paintings Kirchner now proceeds towards his new subject matter—the Swiss peasants with whom he was to live for the rest of his life. He evolved a technique suitable to his themes in its simplicity, directness, roughness and monumentality. The *Sleigh-Ride* with its clear broad color areas and blunted forms shows the increasing use of blue and violet that become typical. The monumentality of his conception of people during this period is exemplified in the woodcut of the *Old Man and Three Peasant Women* with its rough-hewn, archaic quality, its irregular and broad medieval contours. Kirchner became an important force in the development of modern Swiss painting, attracting many students, and his presence in that country offered a kind of ferment that had been absent since Hodler's day.

*Street Car Passengers, 1909, lithograph, 16 x 13 1/8", Museum of Modern Art.*





*Street Scene, 1913, oil,  
47 1/2 x 35 7/8", Museum of Modern Art*

*Self Portrait with Cat, 1918,  
oil, 47 x 33 1/4", Busch-Reisinger Museum,  
Cambridge, Mass.*

From 1923 on two trends are visible: one an extension of the symbolically sculptural forms just seen, and another related to the cubists, especially Picasso. These latter pictures (predated, as had been a number of early fauve works in order to attain a spurious priority) are characterized by a typically Germanic adaptation of a French technique. They seem, in spite of a personal use of color, to represent a relatively unoriginal side of Kirchner's art and a deviation from his main stream of creation.

Shortly before 1933 he was working on a series of mural decorations for the Folkwang Museum in Essen, but the accession of the Nazis put a stop to this job. Kirchner was caught up in the Nazi art purge, and in 1937 six hundred and thirty-nine of his works were confiscated as "degenerate," twenty-five being exhibited in the notorious Munich exhibition that summer. These events, together with his now failing health, led to his suicide in 1938.

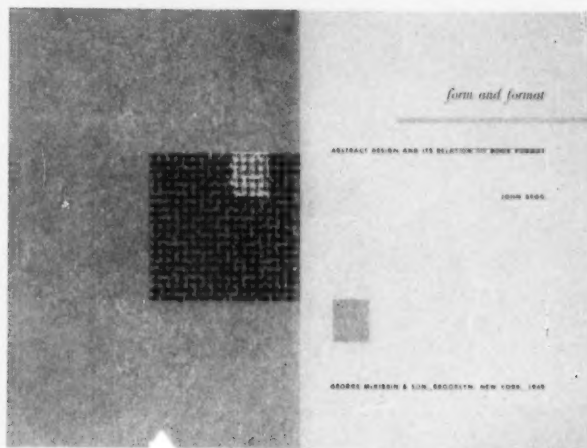
Those who have had the privilege of going through the Kirchner Estate, now in the hands of the Basel Museum under Dr. Georg Schmidt, can appreciate the range and extent of Kirchner's creativity. Through this vast accumulation—with its ups and downs—runs the bright thread of Kirchner's powerful imagination and vivid emotional reaction to the visible and invisible worlds.





# ABSTRACT ART AND TYPOGRAPHIC FORMAT

*John Begg*



*The arts aspire, if not to complement one another, at least to lend one another new energies.*—BAUDELAIRE

THE similarities between the graphic arts and the "fine" arts are greater than the differences, for the art in both may be defined as the systematic application of knowledge or skill in effecting a desired expression. The basic difference is one of degree and of the media employed, rather than of principles. Typography is the art of distributing space and arranging symbols (type and picture) to convey a message effectively.

Letters themselves, it must be remembered, were in the beginning pictorial symbols. What now is our alphabet is but the abstract residue of picture writing. Each letter represents the end result of a series of transformations from image to abstract device—abstractions that are accepted by the most conservative among us.

The format or space in which type is arranged is as much the typographer's concern as is the selection of an appropriate type face that will satisfy the conditions of suitability to process, purpose and expression. Space itself becomes an active design element rather than the frame around a design, something to be filled.

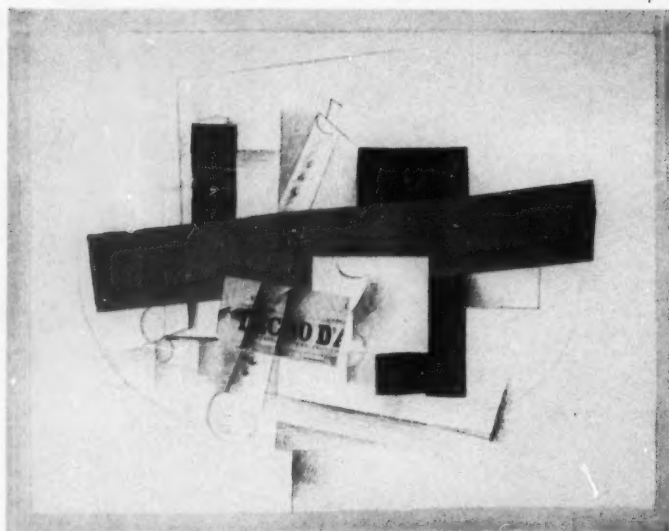
The layout or the interrelating of units of type to pictorial and design units is the area in which the typographer can contribute most to the expression of an idea. Traditional type faces can be used to express contemporary concepts. Indeed, it is of the nature of type that its forms cannot suddenly depart from traditional forms and

remain legible. While superficially there are surface fluctuations in type forms, the great differences in historic periods of typography are due to arrangement and changing decorative accessories. Old type faces may still be used—but in new layouts. In fact, the spirit of the layout is more important than its component elements. Therefore, new points of view are of more immediate influence than new materials, although new physical conditions of production must eventually find reflection in expression.

It must be remembered that the various "isms" of the art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are but convenient names by which to label various points of view, all representing efforts to replace the traditional pictorial and literary emphasis by a re-examination of formal visual relationships. The whole cultural climate brought about by new space and time concepts, along with new mechanical developments, have had their impact upon the artist and, through him, on the graphic designer. With the industrial revolution and the mechanization of what was once a handicraft, the various operations necessary to produce a piece of printed matter became more and more

*Above: John Begg, Book title page, 1949  
(from Books for Our Time, Oxford University Press, 1951)*

*Line, shape, texture and color used in double spread title to allude to book's contents.*



Georges Braque, *Clarinet*, 1913,  
private collection, New York  
*Geometric surface divisions and  
contrasts in texture supersede  
traditional representation  
of forms and space.*

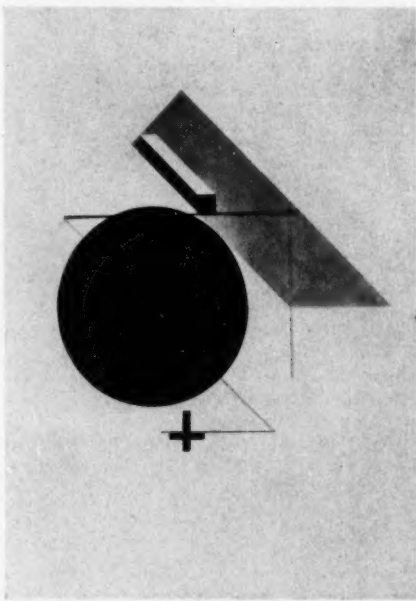
the job of many men, each specializing in one phase of the process. The printer became a manufacturer, owning the tools and materials necessary to turn out a mass product. Thus the greater range of possibilities opened up by new processes of printing created the need for the graphic specialist—the typographic designer.

Whenever we wish to express an idea we must first translate it into a medium of communication, and the graphic image is one of man's most direct means, as language owes so much of its meaning to the eye. The eyes act almost automatically to impress us before we use our reason.

The printed page, whether of book, magazine or poster, is a flat plane, defined by four edges. Place a line upon this plane and a simple relationship is set up: space above, below and on either side is created. Now add a second element, a square of type; a third, an illustration. More complex relationships result, not only of the elements to the plane but to each other. In addition, tension and movement are implied. The effectiveness of the page is dependent upon the welding of the various parts into a coherent unity; the desire to communicate must be given appropriate form. Orderly relation between material and meaning is design. In typography, as in the other arts, the elements of line, shape, texture and color are used within space to create unity and variety by means of balance, rhythm and contrast. Thus the typographer's problem, that of communication through the organization of abstract shapes on a plane, parallels the abstract painter's area of experiment. Contemporary art in its explorations focused new attention on the fundamentals of visual communication, since the formulas of the past were replaced by a dynamic inquiry into formal principles of design.

Cubism and its derivatives—the structural, geometric, non-figurative branch of contemporary art—have had more to teach the typographer than expressionism, which is more emotional, mystical and romantic, or than surrealism, which was basically literary in its content. Since an architectural quality of organization is central to good typographic arrangement, the structural lessons of cubism closely relate to problems of layout.

El Lissitzky, *Proun*, 1923, lithograph, Museum of Modern Art  
*Constructivist principles of strong contrasts  
in abstract shapes, weights and directions*



1. Joost Schmidt, Cover, Office Furniture catalogue, 1924. 2. Zdenka Rossmanna, Title page for volume of poetry, 1936. 3. Piet Zwart, Advertisement, Netherlands Cable Factory, 1924. 4. El Lissitzky, Title page, A Suprematist Tale about Two Squares, 1922. From the Jan Tschichold Collection, Department of Architecture and Design, Museum of Modern Art.



Cézanne announced the return to geometry, and the cubists, Picasso and Braque, took the lead in a thorough re-examination of formal organization. Their freedom from the domination of the pictorial object and their concern for the architecture of picture-making might be said to constitute a rediscovery of plastic logic. This shift in emphasis is at the root of the contribution of abstract art to typography.

Cubism, however, never quite pushed its conclusions to the ultimate elimination of the object. It remained for Russian suprematism and Dutch neo-plasticism to design in pure geometric terms. Kasimir Malevich of Moscow reduced his compositional elements to the square, the circle, the cross and the line, experimenting with simple arrangements of these basic shapes composed on a diagonal axis. This device of designing on the diagonal rather than the perpendicular axis was to become one of the most important characteristics of the new typography. Alexander Rodchenko, one of the younger artists influenced by Malevich, after some years of experimenting with geometric compositions made with rule and compass, eventually turned to the practice of typography. The influence of suprematism then spread to Germany, primarily through the work of El Lissitzky. Lissitzky, however, is only one of the many painters who also worked in the field of typography. The influence of the painters was not only indirect but often more immediate, through their typographic projects, as in Lissitzky's storybook for children. It is interesting to note that it is in the field of juvenile books, where the artist is often the book designer as well, that some of the most progressive typography is to be found today.

It was primarily through the work of Mondrian and van Doesburg that neo-plasticism exerted its influence on typographic arrangement. In 1915 Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg formed



selector guide									
after the usual selection, with the variable selected									
table entry	material chemical composition (per cent)	variable operating conditions					temperature		
		high speed low speed	high speed low speed	high speed low speed	high speed low speed	high speed low speed	high speed low speed	high speed low speed	high speed low speed
Aluminum Metal	copper 40 iron 60	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Aluminum Metal	copper 75 iron 25	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Phosphorized Aluminum Metal	copper 75 phosphorus 0.03 iron 25	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Aluminum Bronze	copper 75 phosphorus 0.03 iron 25	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Red Brass, 85%	copper 85 iron 15	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Phosphorized Copper	copper 99.99 iron 0.01	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Aluminum Copper	copper 99.99 iron 0.01	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
80-20 Copper-Nickel	copper 80 nickel 20	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
70-30 Copper-Nickel	copper 70 nickel 30	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Sevill Manufacturing Company

Ladislav Sutnar, Catalogue page (from *Catalog Design Progress*, Sweets Catalog Service, New York, 1950)

Abstract design principles lend a functional logic which results in greater legibility.

a small group of artists and architects which they called *De Stijl*. Their publication of the same name was a typographic demonstration of their theories. Central to their philosophy and directly applicable to typography is Mondrian's statement: "It is important to discern two sorts of equilibrium. First, a static balance, and second, a dynamic equilibrium. The first maintains the individual unity of particular forms. The second is the unification of forms, or of elements of forms, through continuous opposition."

It is easy to see the surface similarity between such layouts as Sutnar's catalogue page and the experiments of neo-plasticism. More significant, however, is the contribution of a logic of arrangement which contributes to legibility and usefulness. Elaborations on the strong asymmetrical qualities of both the Russian and the Dutch movements led to the complete abandonment of the static formal balance which had traditionally prevailed in typography since its beginnings. At the same time, the increasing use of photo-mechanical processes in printing freed the layout from the rigid rectangle of the page which the practical or mechanical limitations of lockup on the press had dictated previously.

Besides the influence of suprematism and neo-plasticism, another influence was that of the dadaists—although dada was primarily an irra-

tional movement. One of its most persuasive exponents was Kurt Schwitters. His preoccupation with typography was combined with the use of the cut-and-pasted-paper technique that the cubists had developed. The design possibilities of typographical material were exploited in his *collages*, frequently made up of printed ephemera. Sometimes he took single letters and used them as compositional elements, not only for their associated sound values but also as pure shapes.

This free arrangement of type was also explored by the futurist, Marinetti, in his use of the visual appearance of words to heighten their meaning, as in the page from his book *Les Mots en Liberté*. Similarly, Guillaume Apollinaire in his "*calligrammes*" added an expressive silhouette to his poems of peace and war. Apollinaire, like Marinetti, was primarily active in the field of literature, and both had prominent parts in formulating the philosophies of cubism and futurism, respectively. Their experiments with type made their small contribution not as models to be applied directly, but rather by demonstrating the other extreme from a typography grown so colorless and lacking in contrast. Marinetti was characteristically extravagant when he declared in 1912, "I am about to initiate a revolution in typography—directed against so-called typographic harmony. My typographic revolution allows me to give words all the speed and power of airplanes, trains, waves, of explosives, of the sea spray, of

Kurt Schwitters, Merz, 1920, collage, collection of the author  
Design possibilities of non-pictorial material.





Paul Renner, Advertisement for Futura type, Berlin, 1930  
The range of weights provides a scale of typographic color contrasts.

# FUTURA

## ein welterfolg

mager

halbfett

fett

schräg mager

halbfett

black

bauersche giesserei  
frankfurt am main

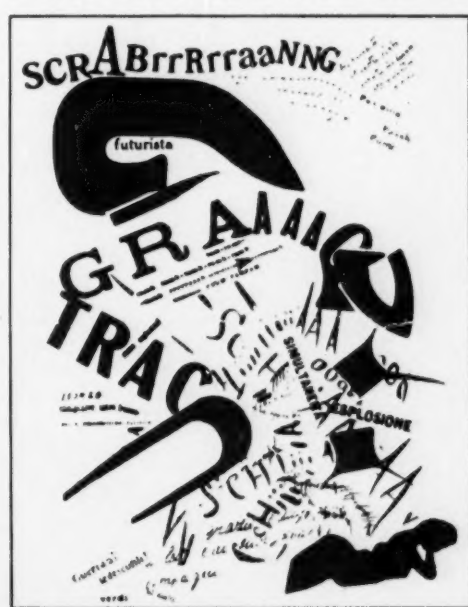
die futura hat im laufe weniger jahre in europa wie in amerika eine überraschend weite verbreitung gefunden, und die zahl ihrer freunde mehrt sich stetig. die uneingeschränkte anerkennung, die diese schrift fand, war nicht vor auszusehen, denn man weiß, wie sehr in dingen der typografie die anschauungsweise der völker und kontinente auseinandergeht. worin beruht das geheimnis dieses erfolges? soviel ist gewiß: die futura ist keine modische schrift, weder im besseren noch im minderen sinne des wortes. sie erzwingt nicht durch verblüffende formen beachtung, sie dient nicht nur dem augenblick, und sie deckt mehr als die absichten des tages. in der futura gelang die vollendete sichtbarmachung eines großen formgedankens. ihre schönheit gründet sich auf die reinheit ihrer gesinnung, und sie überzeugt mit der kraft, mit der ein vollkommenes werk überzeugt.

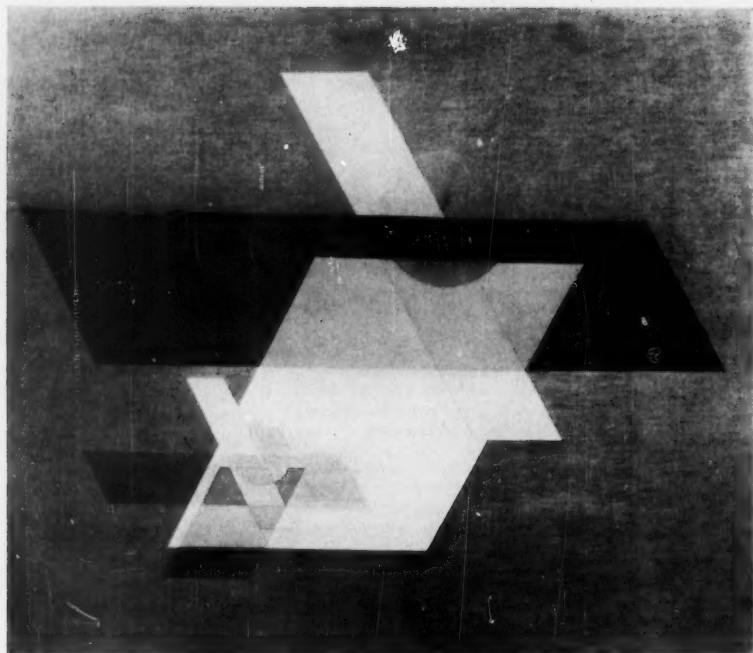
atomic energy." The asymmetrical shapes formed by their type areas broke away from the restricting rectangle into which type is traditionally fitted. The style characterized by lines with unequal margins and irregular placement of display lines was a by-product of their iconoclasm.

In the 1920's the strongest influences of abstract art were channeled through the Bauhaus and, through its curriculum, applied to the graphic arts—a curriculum set up under the direction of Walter Gropius with the express purpose of relating the findings of all the creative arts to the applied arts. The various theories that were consolidated and applied at the Bauhaus in Weimar (1919-25) were introduced there by the presence on the faculty of such artists as Kandinsky, Klee, Marc, Feininger and Moholy-Nagy. Later at Dessau (1925-28) they were joined by Joseph Albers, Herbert Bayer, Joost Schmidt and Alexander Schawinsky, all of whom have had direct impact on typographic design.

Within the Bauhaus the man who perhaps best represents the joining of theory with practice was László Moholy-Nagy. His great enthusiasm and versatility developed new ideas in all branches of applied and creative activity. One of his assignments was the typography for the fourteen Bauhaus books which present the documents, theory and practice of this concerted effort to integrate the new design philosophy.

Below, left: Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cravat and Watch*, from *Calligrammes*, 1918; right: Marinetti, *Les Mots en Liberté*, 1919  
The pattern of the words reinforce their meaning.





László Moholy-Nagy, *Construction A II*, 1924, tempera, courtesy Museum of Modern Art

The effort of all these movements to catch the "feel" of the machine age and communicate its message directly had its effect even on type faces, for example, such geometric designs as Paul Renner's Futura and the experimental type projects of Joseph Albers and Herbert Bayer. The Futura type family is notable in its provision of a series of six different weights. This flexibility, affording greater possibility for contrasts, is part

of the ideology of the new typography. Strong contrasts of "color" as well as shapes are characteristic of the new expression, instead of matching styles of type for all parts of a layout.

To the traditionally minded, all the rules for the effective use of type were handed down to us as accomplished formulas. On the other hand, to the contemporary minded a valid basis for the solution of a design problem is an unham-

Paul Rand, *Poster for Kaiser Corporation*, courtesy William H. Weintraub & Co., Inc.  
*Painting and poster use the same principle of transparent planes to create space.*



Bradbury Thompson, Magazine layout  
(from *Mademoiselle*, 1949, courtesy  
Street and Smith Publications, Inc.)

The underlying structure of  
the layout serves to unify  
the "realistic" elements.



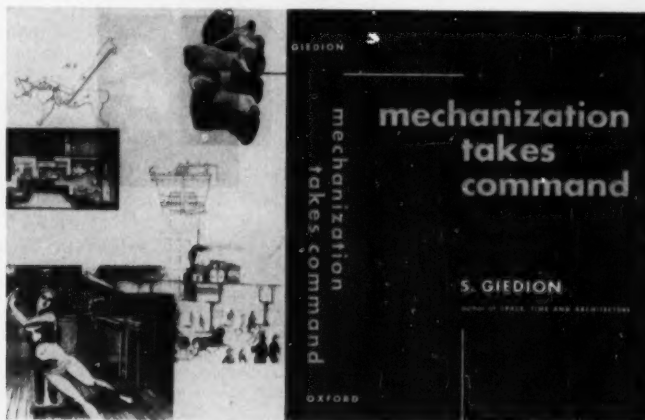
pered use of all the qualities of type and arrangement. No habit or formula is allowed to predetermine the solution to a problem.

Type can be arranged to create an impression beyond its primary function of legibility. It is in this expressiveness that typography has learned most from abstract art. It is also on this question of expression as a function of typography that most argument can still be generated among conservative designers. It is interesting to note that Jan Tschichold, one of the influential spokesmen for the new typography, has in recent years repudiated most of the ideas of his early practice and teachings as embodied in his *Die Neue Typographie* (Berlin, 1928) and *Typographische Gestaltung* (1935) and allied himself on the side of the conservatives. The examples of early typographic experiments illustrating this article are, as a matter of fact, from Tschichold's personal collection, now a part of the graphic design collection of the Museum of Modern Art.

The new energies which abstract art lent to typography and the international scope of its influence is indicated by the names of just a few of its pioneer practitioners—the Czech, Zdenka Rossmanna; the German, Joost Schmidt; the Pole, Wladyslaw Strzeminski; the Dutchman, Piet Zwart; the Russian, Alexander Rodchenko; the Swiss, Jan Tschichold. The potency of the new approach is attested by its continuing influence on the graphic arts today in the book, magazine and advertising fields. Only last year, in the "Books for Our Time" exhibition sponsored by the Trade Book Clinic of the American Institute of Graphic Arts, was full-scale recognition given to the impact of the new direction on book design—the most conservative segment of the graphic arts.

It must be recalled that throughout its history, printing has followed the other arts and been influenced by them. It is therefore not a break with tradition that we are now witnessing so much as a renewal.

John Begg, Book jacket, 1948,  
courtesy Oxford University Press



# AN EXHIBITION OF TAPESTRIES

Yvonne Hackenbroch

THE relationship of a piece of tapestry to the wall it covers raises problems which artists of different periods have solved in different ways. Changing fashion has influenced the choice of subject as well as the style. Medieval tapestries follow the established tradition of manuscript and mural paintings. They tell their story through pictures disposed upon the wall in horizontal or decorative sequences, much as words and lines are arranged within a book. Just as an illuminated miniature or a painted fresco is necessarily related to the shape and color of its parchment page or stone wall, so also the weaver approaches his task with similar modesty, respecting the wall that is to receive the tapestries and observing architectural requirements. The famous Angers Apocalypse tapestries of the late fourteenth century exemplify this interdependence of various kinds of surface decoration, as does the Cluny Museum's Unicorn series made in the region of the Loire shortly after 1500. Serving the wall rather than dominating it, tapestry joins tapestry and flower mingles with flower in a pattern of infinite repetition and continuity, to transform the room into a magic garden.

About this time, however, the newly developed form of easel painting began to exercise its influence upon textile design. Tapestries now were surrounded by borders which, like pictures in frames, changed the flat wall hangings into independent units. At first these borders were part of the background, filled with conventional fruit and flower garlands, as in the Tournai tapestry of about 1525 with the *Allegory of Time*. But as the renaissance style evolved, these *bordures* became crowded with architectural elements, busts, herms and cartouches. Growing knowledge of the laws of perspective now permitted an illusion of depth which brought the tapestry into further contrast with the two-dimensional wall behind it and tended to make the weaver rely increasingly on the painter to supply him with designs. This dependence has been continuous from the times of

**NOTE:** The loan exhibition "Two Thousand Years of Tapestry Weaving," current at the Wadsworth Atheneum until January 27th, is the first of its kind to be held in this country. Woven textiles from almost every civilization have been assembled from public and private collections here and abroad by Dr. Adele Weibel, Curator Emeritus of the Detroit Institute of Arts. The exhibition will be seen at the Baltimore Museum of Art from February 27th to March 25th. All tapestries illustrated are in the present exhibition except *Destruction of Niobe's Children* and *the Passing of Venus*.



Raphael, van Orley, Rubens and Boucher to the present day.

As tapestries changed from serving the wall to mastering it, they acquired worldliness. Biblical subjects and scenes from the legends of saints were still predominant in hangings woven in convents for use in churches, but during the fifteenth century, under princely patronage, historical and mythological themes came into prominence. Heroes of antiquity appear in gay, courtly fashion, unruffled by the heat of battle, and serving as inspirations to knighthood. Frequently Christian and pagan themes mingle, as in the tapestries commissioned by Philip the Good of Burgundy to commemorate the founding of the Order of the Golden Fleece in 1430. The subjects depict the exploits of Jason, but as suggested by the Order's Chancellor, the Bishop of Châlons, the fleece of the ram that carried Helle might be interpreted as that which Gideon spread to receive the dew of heaven. Thus the Old Testament judge joins the Greek hero as patron of the Order of the Golden Fleece.

Renaissance patrons favored works of art derived from early or contemporary literary sources. The Tournai tapestry of the *Allegory of Time*, mentioned above, is based upon medieval moral theology. The five symbolical figures are





Allegory of Time, Tournai,  
c. 1525, 6'8" x 9'7",  
French & Company, New York,  
Opposite: Detail, The Present

labeled in French "Wisdom," "Past," "Present," "Future," and "Man," and the legend on a banderole reads:

*Si tu pretens a honneur parvenir  
Es deux recorde et prevois l'advenir*

This has been interpreted by Professor Ernest T. DeWald and Professor Foulet of Princeton: "If you mean to arrive at (or achieve) honor, note well (learn by heart) the two (i. e. the past and present) and foresee the future." Wisdom is represented as a woman, since all virtues appear as female during the middle ages. The Present has two heads, one face looking to the past, the other to the future. Inspired by Petrarch's *Triumphs*, an almost contemporary Franco-Flemish tapestry of related subject from the Metropolitan Museum of Art shows Time in his chariot, accompanied by the patriarchs Nestor, Noah and Methusaleh, riding over prostrate Fame.

From the sixteenth century on, many major factories enjoyed royal patronage, and tapestries often became a matter of dynastic pride. Henri II of France is believed to have commissioned two mythological scenes for Diane de Poitiers' Château d'Anet; they were woven in Paris between 1550 and 1555, after designs by Jean Cousin. One of the pair, representing the *Drowning of Britomartis*, a minor divinity of Crete, shows Diana appearing in the guise of her mortal namesake. The "History of the King" series woven for Louis XIV at the Gobelins factory between 1673 and 1680, records the chief events of his life. These hangings, which were included in the French tapestry exhibition seen in America in 1947-48, have a sumptuous gold-threaded background and portray in all splendor the reign of the *Roi Soleil*.

The recording of historical events required faithful and exacting rendering of detail. But

fancy and make-believe had full play in the themes of stage designs and circus, *chinoiserie* and arabesques, following designs by Bérain, Pillement and others. About the middle of the eighteenth century, however, under the influence of François Boucher, pictorial subjects again took the ascendancy. In contemporary designs, such as those by Jean Lurçat, the tapestry tradition seeks new expression through a synthesis of representational and abstract.

England was famous for its medieval embroidered work—*opus anglicanum*. English woven textiles, however, have been far less studied than the French, and the subject of their development was somewhat neglected until recently, when the

Triumph of Time, Franco-Flemish, early 16th century,  
12'2" x 12'4", Metropolitan Museum of Art





Drawing of Britomartis, from the Diana Series, after a design by Jean Cousin, French (Paris?), 1550-55, 15'3" x 9'7", Metropolitan Museum of Art

City of Birmingham celebrated the Festival of Britain with an exhibition of English tapestries.

In 1561 a county squire from Warwickshire, William Sheldon, established looms on his estate at Barcheston Manor. This private enterprise flourished under the direction of Richard Hyckes, whom Sheldon sent with his son, Ralph Sheldon, to study the art of weaving in the Low Countries. In his will Sheldon recorded with pride that he had bestowed much money on the factory, and that it was a means of retaining great sums of money within the Kingdom. After his death in 1570, Ralph Sheldon carried on, and the factory prospered until the times of James I. The fact that an industry entirely dependent upon the resources of a county family should have lasted so long is remarkable. It is due to the sound policy of weaving tapestries for domestic use in country houses—to serve as hangings for protection against draft, pictures to conceal bare walls and cushions to render hard oak benches more comfortable.

Outstanding among Sheldon's achievements are large maps of the Midland Counties; one of Warwickshire, dated 1588, carries the arms of Edward Sheldon and his wife, who lived in that county. A fragment of the map of Gloucestershire, owned by E. D. Guinness, Esq., is included

in the current exhibition. Geographical themes fit well within the framework of Tudor patriotism; the tapestries may find their literary counterpart in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, where a procession of rivers comes to celebrate the marriage of the Thames and Medway.

The small scale of other Sheldon panels may indicate that some of the looms were set up by individual workers in cottages on his estate. Such a panel from the collection of Mr. Irwin Untermyer represents the *Sacrifice of Isaac* and bears the inscription: HAVE A STRONG FAITH IN GOD ONELY; NOT THIS BVT THY GOOD WILL. An almost exact Latin rendering of the latter part of this inscription: NON DONVM SED DONANTIS ANIMVM, is found on a similar panel with the *Flight into Egypt* in the Victoria and Albert Museum. The actual loom width of Sheldon cushion covers is about twenty inches; the representations are usually Biblical, often adapted after the Flemish engravings. Two cushion covers with episodes from the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*, lent to the current exhibition by Mr. Irwin Untermyer, are typical examples.

A great period of English tapestry weaving followed during the reign of Charles I. In 1619, prompted by the enthusiasm of Charles as Prince of Wales, James I had set up a tapestry manufactory at Mortlake on Thames. This foundation under royal charter was patterned on a similar enterprise in Paris, for which Henri IV had engaged Flemish weavers. At Mortlake, old hands from Sheldon's factory carried on side by side with Flemish workers, and the English character of the earlier designs was gradually modified so that it came to have close affinities with Parisian work. Henceforth English tapestries became more formalized and worldly. The preference of the seventeenth century for classical-historical subjects is evident in the titles of some of the first sets of Mortlake tapestries: the *Story of Vulcan and Venus*; the *History of Hero and Leander*; and the *Acts of the Apostles* after cartoons by Raphael, some of them acquired by Charles I for Mortlake and now at the Victoria and Albert Museum. If a tapestry signed by Pieter von Steen, woven by Flemish workmen from cartoons by Raphael, can be called English at all, it is only by some freak of inspired patronage; but that freak did occur, owing to the discriminating taste of Charles I. Mortlake enjoyed a high reputation throughout the seventeenth century, although its finest productions were crowded into little more than twenty years. As Crown property, the factory suffered heavily under the Commonwealth, declined further during the Restoration and closed at the end of the century.

Meanwhile other factories came into being, among them the workshop of the Great Wardrobe at Soho, directed by John Vanderbanc until his death in 1727. A certain continuity of style from late Mortlake to early Soho tapestries can be observed, particularly where mythological subjects

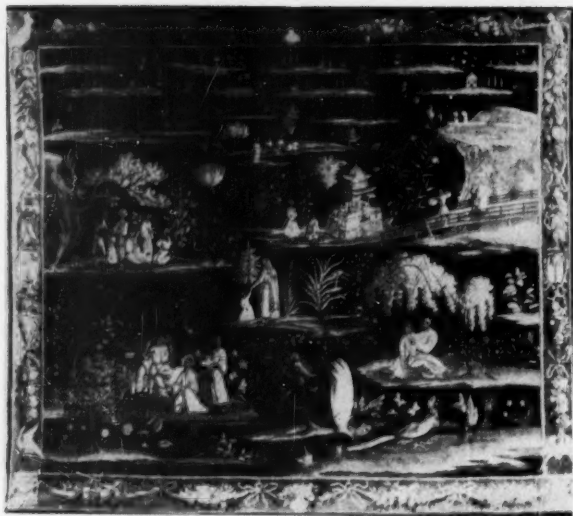
Sacrifice of Isaac, English,  
Sheldon Factory, 16th century,  
8½ x 11¼",  
collection Irwin Untermyer,  
New York



Destruction of Niobe's Children,  
after a design by Francis Clouet,  
English, Mortlake Factory,  
17th century, 12'8" x 19'4",  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

Alpheus Pursuing Arethusa,  
English, Soho Factory, 18th century,  
5'11½" x 8'9",  
Detroit Institute of Arts





*Toilet of the Princess, English, John Vanderbanc,  
1690-1700, 11 x 13', Yale University Art Gallery*

are concerned. Gradually, however, as the heavier baroque style gave way to the lighter swing of rococo, classical legends were rendered less pretentiously. Figures grew smaller in scale and moved in familiar English parkland rather than through heroic landscapes. The Detroit Institute of Art's *Alpheus Pursuing Arethusa* shows this change. Vanderbanc designed several *chinoiserie* tapestries to harmonize with Queen Anne lacquer furniture in the Chinese style; one of a set of four from Glemham, Suffolk, now the property of Yale University, is included in the exhibition. Joshua Morris, another Soho master, created tapestries with arabesque in the style of Bérain; their deco-

rative playfulness expresses the capricious mood of the rococo more faithfully than do the story-telling pictures.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century a revival of the art of tapestry weaving took place. At Merton Abbey William Morris, a member of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, organized the looms, which produced hangings after drawings by Burne-Jones. *The Passing of Venus* from the Detroit Institute of Art is typical in its languid beauty and technical perfection. Imbued with the spirit of the traditional art of weaving in England, it may be called as anachronistic as it is romantic.

*Passing of Venus, detail, after a design by Edmund Burne-Jones (1833-98), English, Merton Abbey, Detroit Institute of Arts*





## Contributors

SIEGFRIED GIEDION, now resident in Dolderal, Switzerland, was trained in art history under Heinrich Wölfflin at Munich. His *Space, Time and Architecture*, which grew out of lectures given while he was Charles Eliot Norton Professor at Harvard, has already gone through eight printings since its first appearance in 1941.

SAM HUNTER, whose article on Guttuso and de Chirico appeared in *MAGAZINE OF ART* for November, 1951, was formerly an art critic on the *New York Times*. He has been in Italy for the past two years engaged in research both on modern artists and on masters of the renaissance and baroque periods.

A native of Minneapolis, MINOR WHITE has been head of the photography department of the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco since 1946. He is currently preparing an illustrated book on "Concepts for Photography" for Pellegrini & Cudahy and working with Nancy Newhall on an exhibition of his art and writings for George Eastman House, Rochester.

The article by BERNARD MYERS is excerpted from a forthcoming book, *Expressionist Painting in Modern Germany*, completed with the aid of a grant from the Bollingen Foundation. Mr. Myers, formerly guest professor at the University of Texas, is the author of *Modern Art in the Making* (McGraw-Hill, 1950).

JOHN BEGG is exceptionally well qualified to discuss the relationship of art and typography since he is himself active both as typographer and sculptor. Director of Design and Production for the Oxford University Press in New York since 1939, he is also a director of the American Institute of Graphic Arts, and Instructor in Basic Design and Typography at New York University. His sculpture has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum, Worcester Art Museum, Brooklyn Museum and elsewhere.

A specialist in the decorative arts, YVONNE HACKENBROCH received her Ph.D. from the University of Munich and also studied at Rome. She was formerly on the staff of the British Museum and was curator of the Lee Collection at the University of Toronto, 1945-49. She is now engaged in cataloguing the private collection of Judge Irwin Untermyer, New York.

## Forthcoming

The January issue will include "Standardization, Reproduction and Choice" by LEWIS MUMFORD; HANS RICHTER, "Easel-Scroll-Film"; A. HYATT MAYOR, "Chinese Painting and Writing"; MILDRED FISCHER, "Three Finnish Weavers"; a personal reminiscence of John Sloan by FORBES WATSON, and an article by NAUM GABO on his new construction for the Baltimore Museum.

JANUARY, 1952

## Notes on American Art Abroad

(See the editorial on page 2)

### FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT IN ITALY

*Excerpts from a letter written by Oskar Stonorov to Lawrence M. C. Smith, President, The American Federation of Arts, August 20, 1951:*

"Now that the exhibition of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright is about to close at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, I want to thank you for the aid that you and The American Federation of Arts gave. It may sound very odd, but it is true that had it not been for a few people of conviction to pay for the insurance of this great manifestation of American culture in Italy, this great enterprise, whose total cost was paid for by Gimbel Brothers, Philadelphia, might have been shipwrecked in spite of all the preparations made by the city of Florence. . . .

"You may enjoy knowing that approximately five hundred specially invited people witnessed the opening in the Sala del Dugento of the Palazzo Vecchio and that over three thousand people stormed the Palazzo Strozzi at the opening hour.

"I know that the State Department is afraid of the criticisms of certain congressmen who might not think that our foreign ministry has any business in advertising the art and culture of the United States. How mistaken such an opinion is is proved by this exhibition. . . . To people abroad America, with Frank Lloyd Wright, has added its own to the galaxy of world art: Michelangelo, Brunelleschi, Leonardo, Borromini, Mansard. . . .

"The recital of this experience should make it apparent that federal aid of indeed a very small nature is needed to protect the reputation of the United States abroad. . . . We now have requests from Great Britain, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Yugoslavia, India, Israel for the exhibition. . . . To circulate the fifteen tons of material of the Frank Lloyd Wright show through Europe, including India, for instance, would cost only the price of one-fifteenth of a medium bomber. . . ."

### AMERICAN WORKS OF ART IN BERLIN

*Excerpts from the West Berlin press, quoted in a Foreign Service Despatch sent from HICOG, Berlin, to the Department of State, September 26th, 1951:*

"The most striking characteristic of these works seems to be their broad manner which enables the artists to give their paintings a clear and distinct organic expression by using only a few bold strokes. . . . Another one, mainly to be observed in the nineteenth-century paintings and somewhat amazing with a people whose conception of life is often described as puritan, is its romanticism which, however, remains far from exaltation and may be derived from natural,

strong feelings, ranging from a tender lyric to powerful elementary outbursts." (Albert Buesche in *Der Tagesspiegel*)

"Neither misery nor hard work are suppressed as subject matter; nevertheless the steel bridge structure, boldly spread over the globe, as shown in Charles Sheeler's daring painting, gives evidence of America's tremendous optimism." (Dr. Dargel in *Der Telegraf*)

"There is Morris Graves with his delicate animal-like sketches, which belong to the best of their kind in modern art . . . and Georgia O'Keeffe with one of her bold, melancholy landscapes reminding us of our Kaspar David Friedrich." (Herr Huhmer in *Der Abend*)

"The over-all impression is a calm one, often somewhat sober, sometimes reflecting lyrical moods or dreamy frames of mind . . . even advancing into spiritual fields. There are, for instance, some painters whose works give us an impression of having caught a glimpse of the forces behind the aspect of Nature. Two of them are Lee Gatch and Georgia O'Keeffe." (*Der Tag*)

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## Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir:

Reading the editorial, "The 'New Academy,'" in the November, 1951, issue of the *MAGAZINE OF ART* has made me pause to consider what the plight of abstract art and the meaning of the "new academy" really are. None of us, I believe, can deny that there is a category of contemporary painting that can be termed "academic modern" and that most honest artists do only as their consciences best guide them. It is, however, the duty of the responsible critic to recognize whether it is a good conscience . . . and the editorial shirks true responsibility in refuting Carlo Carrà's position as being only another in a "series of rebellions" against abstract and nonrepresentational painting.

Firstly, Sig. Carrà's article was not rebellious. From his phraseology, such violence is inconceivable. To associate him with the Communist propagandists of France (and America) and with the surrealists of England is to do him a great injustice. . . .

Secondly, the term "new academy," as used in Sig. Carrà's article, is not abusive. The complaint is against those artists who maintain that abstract art is the only true one; and against the resultant dehumanization of painting. . . .

Thirdly, and most importantly, is the matter of responsibility. The editorial does not see the forest for the trees. . . .

As the editorial itself declares, the person best qualified to speak about such matters of art is the practicing artist. It is as such that I write.

Abstract painting is theoretical painting, and anything theoretical, until it can be put to actual use, is thoroughly meaningless. Theorem in geometry is without meaning until it can be put to use; likewise, the whole of geometry is without meaning until it can be applied to a concrete problem. Is it not the same with nonrepresentational art: can a mere demonstration of the possibilities inherent in drawing, composition and technique have meaning in itself?

The artist goes to school, or is apprenticed, to learn what the tools of painting are. There he is taught all the niceties of line, form, color, space and working materials. They are but the mechanics, the theory, the *means*. The *end* of painting cannot be taught, or even explained—it must be discovered, for it lies in understanding pictorial, and not literal, reality. Given the tools, the artist may extend their use as far as his imagination will allow. But by extending only the range of the tools, he does not necessarily extend the range of pictorial reality. True, nonrepresentational painting has fascination. It may even be provocative, but no more so than a highly intricate, smoothly operating, but wholly useless machine!

In all forms of art we have demanded the principle of function. In architecture, the building must conform to its apparent use; in furniture design, the chair must be capable of being sat upon. Why does this not hold true for painting? Has painting no use? . . .

Abstract art . . . as art, is neither reactionary nor progressive, however undeniably progressive it may be in the discovery of new possibilities with the theory. Being neither one thing nor the other, how can abstract painting be considered on a value par with the renaissance, the baroque or the romantic movements? It is a movement, yes, but its meaning lies not in the realm of painting but in that of philosophy.

No one can dictate to any artist what he should or should not do. It is, however, our duty and responsibility to remind him of the difference between art, philosophy and the meaningless (albeit imaginative) wielding of the tools of art.

THOMAS R. BARRETT  
New York, N. Y.

[*Editor's Note: Matter must not be confused with manner, and however polite in form, both Sig. Carrà and Mr. Barrett have rebellious intentions; properly so since that is their conviction. There are of course "academic" pictures in the abstract vein just as there are in the representational. This only suggests that both are widely accepted today; if we are to condemn all types of art of which there exist academic examples, we should simply forbid the arts altogether. Finally, we cannot agree that the abstract direction is but preparation and exercise. In view of the great variety and real achievement of abstract artists in many countries over the last forty years, abstraction must be accepted as one of the major forms of visual expression of this century. If the good old days were indeed good, they are now also old.*]

Sir:

I am writing a monograph on General Seth Eastman, the painter of the American Indian. The Eastman material is now widely scattered. I would greatly appreciate it if anyone who owns any of his paintings, watercolors, drawings, sketch-books, manuscripts or letters will communicate with me. Full credit will be given to anyone calling my attention to material that is unknown to me.

MARVIN C. ROSS  
Walters Art Gallery

Sir:

I am making a study of Benjamin West's drawings with the hope of compiling a complete catalogue of them. I should appreciate very much knowing of drawings, paintings and letters by West. All communications will be duly acknowledged.

HELMUT VON ERFFA  
Rutgers University

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## Film Review

**New Way of Gravure**, produced by Jess Paley, demonstration and narration by Stanley William Hayter. 16 mm; black and white; sound; 1 reel (12 min.). Available from A. F. Films, Inc., 1600 Broadway, New York 18. Rental \$4; sale \$40.

**Joan Miro Makes a Color Print**, produced by Thomas Bouchard, narrated by Stanley William Hayter and Ruthven Todd. 16 mm; color; sound; 2 reels. Available from Thomas Bouchard Productions, 80 West 40th Street, New York 18. Rental \$25.

**How to Make an Etching**, produced by Almanac Films, photographed and directed by Sol Wirth and Warren Miller, demonstration by Milton Goldstein, narrative by Warren Miller. 16 mm; black and white; sound; 2 reels (18 min.). Available from Almanac Films, Inc., 516 Fifth Avenue, New York. Sale \$90; app'y for rental rates.

In 1940 Stanley William Hayter, the British engraver, moved his studio, *Atelier 17*, from Paris to New York. He won quick recognition as a printmaker and teacher and, as in Paris, his workshop has attracted painters, sculptors and students. His New York studio, one flight up on East 8th Street, is the setting for two new films.

The first, in black and white, is a demonstration lesson with Hayter as teacher. The camera records the genesis of a recent print, *Angels Wrestling*—the preliminary sketches on paper, the development of the composition on copper, the inking and final printing of the plate. Two rules of the Hayter academy are emphasized: insistence on forceful engraving and the use of etched textures—the last a quick method of achieving a pictorial effect. Perhaps not sufficient for the novice, *New Way of Gravure* is valuable to the amateur and student for its detailed picture of today's most influential engraver at work.

Several close-ups of the surface of the print and its plate create unusual screen images: threads of copper curling as the burin incises line into the metal; the protean quality of the design as it is engraved and etched. Unfortunately the footage seems inexpertly cut, and a series of dissolves might have better summarized the various states in the development of the print.

The second film made at the *Atelier 17* is in color. In *Joan Miro Makes a Color Print*, Hayter acts as host to the ingenuous sophisticate, Miro. The painter's enthusiasm is contagious. The spectator shares at once his adventure in making a print. Miro explores each of Hayter's suggestions and has a wonderfully good time doing it. The shape of the etching upon which he works is horizontal, matching the dimensions of the screen. This allows Miro's fantasy to fill the camera's eye. The use of color exploits and dramatizes the everyday tools of the printmaker's studio—the gleaming copper plates, the various prints and

inks, the black "resists," the blue nitric acid baths. Although strict attention is paid to technical procedure, a lesson in graphic media is not stressed. Expertly photographed and directed, this is a memorable visit with Miro; as such, it may be enjoyed by anyone. At the same time, the old, if unfamiliar, methods of relief etching and printing offer a special interest to the expert.

The commentary for *New Way of Gravure* is instructive and concise; that for *Joan Miro Makes a Color Print* is less adequate. Indeed, the assertive spoken images of the latter's sound-track are often so profuse and figurative that they crowd and rival the already vivid images projected on the screen. For both films Hayter doubles as narrator, a role shared with Ruthven Todd in the Miro. Hayter's voice records clearly, and his delivery is thoroughly professional.

A third print film has been made by the young American etcher, Milton Goldstein. Its subject is specifically *How to Make an Etching*. The technical mechanics which often confuse the layman are elucidated step by step. The commentary adds pertinent information about necessary chemicals and tools, and at the end of twenty minutes the spectator should feel that he can make a print. Goldstein emphasizes etching rather than engraving. Although Hayter shows both, Goldstein plans a better how-to-do-it lesson. The first third of the commentary may seem too quickly paced. Nevertheless, the film offers a simple and itemized explanation that can be understood by any beginner.

WILLIAM S. LIEBERMAN  
Museum of Modern Art

## Recent Art Film Releases

**Buma: African Sculpture Speaks**, produced, written and directed by Henry R. Cassirer on the basis of research by Ladislav Segy; photographed and edited by Lewis Jacobs. Music recorded in Africa by Arthur S. Alberts. The role of statues and masks in the tribal life of the African native. 16 mm; color; sound; 1 reel. Available from the Segy Gallery, 708 Lexington Avenue, New York 22. Apply for rates.

**Color Keying in Art and Living**, made in collaboration with Eliot O'Hara. Abstract demonstrations of color relationships and their practical application in art and everyday life. 16 mm; color; sound; 1 reel (11 min.). Available from Encyclopaedia Britannica Films, Inc., Wilmette, Ill. Rental \$4; sale \$100.

**Fra Angelico at San Marco**, directed by Giampiero Pucci, photographed by Renato Sinistri, commentary written by Arthur Knight. Musical adaptation by Virgilio Chiti. 16 mm; black and white; sound; 1 reel (11 min.). Photographed in the Convent of San Marco, Florence. Available from A. F. Films, Inc., 1600 Broadway, New York 19. Rental \$4; sale \$40.



*Paolina's Castle*, produced by Attilio Riccio, directed by Romolo Marcellini, photographed by Rino Filippini, idea of Ezio Bacino. Musical adaptation by Virgilio Chito. The masterpieces of Bernini and Canova in the Villa Borghese, residence of Napoleon's sister, Paolina Buonaparte. 16 mm; black and white; sound; 1 reel. Available from Lux Film Distributing Corporation, 1501 Broadway, New York 18. Apply for rates.

*Toulouse-Lautrec, Painter of the Parisian Bohème*, produced and photographed by Peter Riethof, written by Carolyn Hector, narrated by Conrad Nagel. Music by Offenbach and other late 19th-century composers. Lautrec's life and milieu revealed through his paintings, drawings and posters, photographed from originals in Paris and New York. 16 and 35 mm; color; 3 reels (25 min.). Available from Riethof Productions, Inc., 80 West 40th Street, New York 21. Apply for rates.

## Book Reviews

**Cocteau, Jean, *Blood of a Poet*, translated by Lily Pons, New York, Bodley, 1950. 53 pp., illus. \$5.**

This is a handsome, conscientious commemoration of one of the most important experimental or "art" films made since the invention of cinema. It gives as well as prose can (and it is Cocteau's own) the scene-to-scene, image-to-image, account of its unreeling. Included among the "stills" are several hitherto unpublished photographs of Cocteau directing the film; the page designs and setting alone make the book a desirable object. As a whole, this document is not only desirable but indispensable for anyone wanting to know what it is to make a serious film under commercial conditions which persist at the half-century mark as they did at the quarter. The persecuted patron of *The Blood of a Poet*, Vicomte de Noailles, is not the least interesting factor of this history of the birth and life of the best known among avant-garde movies. Cocteau points out in his preface that the conspiracy of social boycott was broken down in France only by the action of the universities. The so-called Postscript which concludes the volume is the transcript of a lecture delivered by the film-maker at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier when the film was shown there in January 1932. It reveals as well as anything else from the imagination of this poet the essential qualities of his insight and, like the scenario, is itself an exciting literary experience. "Every poem is a coat-of-arms" are the first words spoken in the film. It should be of special interest that Cocteau was inspired by those "painters of blazons and enigmas": Uccello, Piero della Francesca, Castagno.

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### LIGHT PLAY IN BLACK-WHITE-GRAY

By MOHOLY NAGY

WRITE FOR CATALOG

1600 BROADWAY NEW YORK CITY

**Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, Moholy-Nagy: Experiment in Totality, New York, Harper, 1950. ix + 253 pp., 81 illus., 4 in color. \$6.50.**

This is the story of a great art educator and art innovator, told by his widow and colleague. Occasionally, life itself gets into a biography, rising above sympathies, observations and records. Mrs. Moholy has written such a book. I suspect that it will speak for Moholy, and for the influential intelligentsia that formed in Central Europe between the last wars, long after more formal statements lose their interest. Moholy emerges here as a full human being, beginning life under conditions that mold him, developing his heritage with rare integrity and virtue.

The reader can learn from this book how unchanging Moholy's guiding traits were beneath his protean practice of the arts. *Light* was his recurrent fascination. Its mystical significance to him filtered through childhood into his adolescent poems, and without doubt drew him, in the years of his first marriage (1922-29, just overlapping his career as a teacher at the Bauhaus), to an ethical mysticism called *Mazdaznan* after the ancient Persian deity of light and knowledge.

On a more material plane, his deep interest in light led Moholy to fame as a pioneer in photography and the film, as well as in two more direct, creative techniques: that of the *photogram*, where a pattern is developed on photosensitive paper by controlled direct exposures, and a similar use of moving-picture film, where the moving pattern is produced by manipulating a mechanized complex of reflectors called the *space-light modulator*. To Moholy light was the new artistic ocean, barely charted and full of promise. Few have ventured so far upon it, fewer still have left such complete records of their voyages and discoveries. He may prove to be a Magellan of the arts of light.

Another enduring trait of Moholy's, clearly shown in the book, was his suspicion of conventional art forms. He resorted reluctantly to painting and sculpture, however advanced. No doubt his products in these fields were important for his own development and for that of abstract art, yet they rarely seem to show the full measure of the man or the unmistakable mark of his talent. Such reservations cannot be made easily about his writings on art or his work with light.

Next to the love of light, Moholy's strongest trait was his vocation to teach. He was at his best with students, young or old. With them he gave fully of himself, even (I have seen him do

it) extending himself—by drawing on his listeners—beyond his own limits. His periods without teaching, as we may read in the book, were not truly satisfying to him, and the works of art he produced in those years seem to betray this.

Sibyl Moholy brings out these consistent traits of character in her narrative, and much more besides. There is Moholy the Hungarian sentimentalist, well aware of the value of *rubato* in human emotions; Moholy the fighter, who could withstand every pressure of the conventional bourgeoisie as well as of organized communism and nazism, remaining an ardent socialist. There is Moholy's growth as an artist, from expressionism through abstract art to constructivism. There is Moholy as a leading typographer, as poster artist, scenic designer, designer for industry, and inspired salesman of his ideas and ideals. There is Moholy adventurous, often defeated outwardly, but ever relentlessly at work.

This plenitude of material is presented with the effective technique Mrs. Moholy developed when she worked as a film scenarist. Through a large part of the book she uses anecdotes or quotes for flashbacks and close-ups, a happy flow of words implementing her concepts and narrative. Moholy is memorable, telephoning directions for painting a picture to a sign painter, to prove the superfluity of the personal touch in abstract art. Memorable too, the Nazi official dinner for Marinetti in 1934, with Schwitters drunkenly *merzing* Baldur von Schirach, leading to a crashing futurist climax. Besides such a sense of highlights, Mrs. Moholy's well-modulated irony and quick pace keep her writing fresh.

These are considerable accomplishments; yet this book is not the last word on Moholy. We need to know more about his years at the Bauhaus, when Moholy matured, did some of his best work and laid the foundations of his fame. (It is natural that the facts of this period were incompletely explored by this author.) We also need a more rigorous comparison between Moholy's art and that of his associates and contemporaries. The Chicago period is less focused and organized in the book than material dealing with Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam and London—but should we expect more when we realize that this is the author's own recent past? Nevertheless the story of the Moholys in Chicago as written here will assist those who wish to trace human experience behind the course of art in civilization. Moholy's death, which affected all who valued art and courage, is presented simply and trenchantly.

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But a wife's view of Moholy does not dominate the book. One of its values, besides well-chosen lengthy excerpts from Moholy's letters and writings, lies in the direct quotations from other people associated with Moholy and his work. Students at the Bauhaus and from Chicago speak forthrightly, Walter Gropius contributes an Introduction, and Siegfried Giedion a valuable account of a journey to Athens with Moholy and other artists. Those concerned with art education will be particularly grateful for the opportunity to compare crucial moments in the developments of the Dessau Bauhaus and the Chicago Institute of Design—moments when each school sought larger student enrollment and larger subsidy from the business world. The reader of this biography should expect not scholarly completeness, but passionate, intelligent eulogy, true vitality and a fascinating story. **EDGAR KAUFMANN, JR.**

*Museum of Modern Art*

**Robert Gillam Scott, *Design Fundamentals*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1951. x + 199 pp., illus. \$6.**

**C. J. Feldsted, *Design Fundamentals*, New York, Pitman, 1950. 160 pp., illus. \$5 educational; \$6.50 trade.**

The late Moholy-Nagy in his two tremendously influential books almost single-handed revolutionized curricula in pre-professional art schools and at the pre-professional level in design schools. *The New Vision*, which appeared first in German and later in an American edition, laid the foundation of Moholy's educational philosophy and was the first systematic presentation of work in progress. This was reinforced and clarified by the second book, *Vision in Motion*, which proved to be Moholy's last testament. *Language of Vision*, by Moholy's close associate and collaborator Gyorgy Kepes, also proved most influential.

These three works presented a developing philosophy and experiments translating this into an educational tool. The philosophy itself was largely a declaration of faith which might be briefly summarized as follows: Industrial man has to counterbalance his rapidly increasing intellectualism and materialism with a sensibility and emotional security if he is to become the happy and healthy master of his environment. To achieve this he must cultivate the senses through purposeful and principled work in which mind, eye and hand play equal parts. The basic responses of man to his environment do not change except historically and imperceptibly, and man must know himself as well as the energy, tools, processes and products at his disposal.

Application of this set of principles to education continues at the Institute of Design in Chicago, and other attempts are being made in an ever-increasing number of schools, particularly in the United States where the word "design" is more frequently employed than "art." Possibly

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this is happening because we are recognizing that "art" cannot be taught at all, and that "design" is a useful and lucrative commodity. Whatever the reasons, design schools are growing in number and, alas, apparently require textbooks. Two such books have just been published, both under the title of *Design Fundamentals*. That by Mr. Robert Scott, which acknowledges its sources, is substantial both in content and size—a scholarly commentary on visual elements and their manipulation in history. The book could be most useful in the hands of intelligent, imaginative teachers.

The second, by Mr. Feldsted, is in the category of publications succinctly described by Hugo Weber as a "cookbook," in which the author tells you with the dogmatism of the illiterate that this and that are harmony, balance, rhythm, direction, texture, etc., etc. All these, in the author's mind, possess absolute values and properties. If you follow the "lessons," or should we say "recipes" (this is difficult to do because all these terms are apparently also interchangeable), you should obtain delicious dishes of design.

**SERGE CHERMAYEFF**  
*Institute of Design, Chicago*

**Grete Ring, *A Century of French Painting: 1400-1500*, New York, Oxford (Phaidon), 1950. 251 pp., 223 plates, 6 in color. \$8.50.**

This volume belongs to a species that has almost become, in France at least, a literary perennial. Since the great exhibition in 1904 of early paintings supposedly French, the *primitifs français* have periodically sent up new shoots. During the past quarter century there have been, to name only some, Guiffrey, Marcel and Terrasse, 1926-32; Lemoisne, 1931; both Bazin and Dupont, 1937; Réau, 1939; Gillet as well as Charles Jacques (Sterling), 1941. These books all follow more or less the same plan: a collection of plates accompanied by an introductory essay; though two of them add a catalogue. And they are all concerned with more or less the same objects: paintings, chiefly panel paintings, made from the rise of this art in France around 1350-75 to its decline (except for portraits) at the end of the fifteenth century. As the number of surviving French panels of this period is not large, several of the volumes have included almost all the major paintings and many of the minor.

These volumes vary considerably however in critical value, and Miss Grete Ring's is, along with Charles Sterling's, the best of them. It is also the first with an English text. It includes some important new works—a beautiful panel executed, in part at least, by the Rohan Master, hitherto known only as an illuminator and a draftsman; and three paintings by the provincial but very imaginative late fifteenth-century Master of the Life of the Virgin. The plates are exceptionally numerous, and the price of the volume comparatively low. Though the reproductions conform to the standard established by the Phaidon Press, the photographs from which they were made, like most of the available photographs of paintings in the churches and public collections of France, are mediocre. Occasionally it is the halftones too that seem to fail. In the reproduction of Fouquet's panel of *Etienne Chevalier and St. Stephen* (plate 73) all the folds of the saint's mantle have been lost, submerged in an area that is uniformly black and opaque. Both the Lehman portrait by the Maître de Moulins (plate 169) and the Louvre Madonna of around 1400 (plate 25) have been better reproduced elsewhere.

Miss Ring devotes a considerable part of her introductory essay to an account of patronage. This is particularly useful for a period that was distinguished by a great increase in private acquisition and that included such extraordinary collectors as the Duke John of Berri and René of

Anjou. Whatever the similarity in style, however, of the painters that each of these collectors brought into their service, it was scarcely sufficient to give a meaningful stylistic connotation to the term "a Berri Master," which Miss Ring frequently employs. We might with no less meaning—and no more—speak of a "Medici Master." Miss Ring need not, furthermore, have justified her account of patronage by the highly improbable claim of a special relation between French art and its "background." French artists cannot be understood as detached phenomena, the author says—but German and Italian artists can!

The classification of French panel paintings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is a difficult task because of the few surviving works, their diversity of style and the scarcity of documentation. Not one of the important panels is signed, and only a few can be connected with literary sources or records of any kind. Some of these difficulties might be overcome if it were possible to consider the panels within the framework of a precisely reconstructed evolution of illumination and of stained glass, but very little progress has been made in these fields either since the time of Paul Durrieu. Consequently there is still room for the widest variety of judgments, not only as to the authorship and date of paintings but even as to their region, in the very broadest sense. In this controversial area Miss Ring is, on the whole, a good guide. She has weeded out a number of panels that until quite recently have been included in the repertory of French painting but which are actually Spanish, Bohemian, German or English. It is good to see the Wilton diptych, for instance, on the right side of the Channel. She has listed many of these rejected works in her catalogue, and it would have been helpful if she had consistently included references to the publications in which the correct attributions were originally presented. A number of other paintings, which have been debated between Paris, Dijon or Provence, will likewise, I believe, have to be deleted from the shrinking category of authentic early French painting. I refer to the Bargello diptych (plate 16 and figure 27), the Sachs *Annunciation* (plate 17), and the Berlin diptych (plate 19). Miss Ring, who underestimates the Boucicaut Master in her text, does so likewise in the plates, when she attributes to him the panel formerly in the Engel-Gros Collection (plate 7). Indeed, judging from the poor reproduction, I wonder whether it might be Catalan.

MILLARD MEISS  
Columbia University

thru january

## modern french paintings

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**Alfred Stange, German Painting: XIV-XVI Centuries, Paris, Hyperion (distributed by Macmillan), 1950. 160 pp., 112 black-and-white and 17 color plates. \$7.50.**

This book is typical of a present trend in art publications; it is essentially a picture book with a considerable number of color plates. It is, of course, gratifying that photographic processes can do for the visual arts what radio or phonograph records have done for music.

A picture book is especially desirable when it presents, as this one does, paintings of such moving and profound interpretations which are so little known in this country. In such a book, however, just as in an album of recordings, the quality of reproduction is of utmost importance. The black-and-white plates, though uneven, are on the whole satisfactory. On the other hand, the color plates, which should be the high-lights of the book, are unfortunately not successful. False in color, they are often also blurred in printing.

The text, consisting actually of only seventeen pages (five of which are devoted to brief biographical sketches), has only an introductory role. Yet it is not written as an introduction but seems rather a condensation from a larger book. The first two pages particularly are so condensed that they will have meaning only for the specialist familiar with the monuments referred to by the author but not reproduced. The comments on the illustrated material, short as they are, are in many cases helpful guides to an understanding of the paintings. It is unfortunate that no plate numbers are given in the text to facilitate the relation between comments and reproductions; neither is there an index to help the reader find the painting discussed. And the arbitrary rather than chronological insertion of color plates will make the search the more difficult, especially if the inserted corrections to the misplaced captions are lost.

The success of the selection of the plates and the comments varies according to the author's sympathy and philosophy. The earlier painters are well selected and understood. The author still approves of Gruenewald, Altdorfer and Baldung-Grien, even of Dürer, because they are "really German" and "primitive." Holbein is properly punished for his internationalism by being allotted no reproductions of his greatest and latest portraits, those of English royalty.

Yet the book has its value. It is the first separate history of German painting of this period to appear in English. It is regrettable that it has been put together so hastily and with what seems

so little care on the part of either author or publisher. These paintings deserve more attention for the variety of their poetic intention and for the depth of their personal expressiveness.

FRANCES G. GODWIN  
*Queens College*

**Alice Wilson Frothingham, Lustreware of Spain, New York, Hispanic Society of America, 1931. 310 pp., 221 illus. \$8.50.**

This is the best and most up-to-date book on one of the splendid episodes of ceramic history. With order and clarity, and often with a charming vividness, Mrs. Frothingham has gathered together the facts that have come to light over the years from excavations and from archives. Out of this diversity of indications she has told the story of the first great ceramic decoration that was created in Europe after the decline of the Aretine pottery a thousand years before.

The two hundred twenty illustrations hold a lesson for the modern potter, for the Spanish Moors were supreme where modern potters are usually weakest—in painted decoration. Moors created the style of Spanish lustreware and made most of the best pieces. Whether at home in the Near East or as an emigrant in Spain, the Near Eastern potter painted his wares with supreme boldness. When he left home and the surroundings of his past, he pushed his style to its decorative extreme in Spain. Of all pottery painters—even the early Chinese—none had an insolence as splendid as the Spanish Moor's when he flung a twisted blue leaf on a ground of gold tendrils, or wrought a heraldic lion on a platter. His brush discharged its color with an assurance born of practice and delight. The result was a new and original decoration in no sense adapted from frescoes or easel paintings, like so much pottery painting in ancient Greece or Italy during the renaissance. The Greek painted pottery in the style of wall painting, just as he cast clay figurines in the style of bronze and marble sculpture. The Aztec and Mayan potter, on the other hand, modeled in a style that was possible in clay and in nothing else—a magnificent mudpie manner of poking and pushing a pat of clay and then slapping on rolls and pellets. The equally original lustre painting of the Spanish Moors could act as a tonic to the flopping and sprawling ceramic decoration of today.

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